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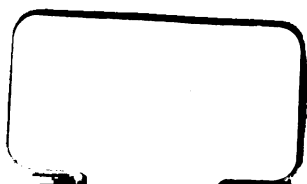
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**S O N N E T S.**





# SONNETS

ON

## ANGLO-SAXON HISTORY.

By ANN HAWKSHAW.

LONDON:

JOHN CHAPMAN,

8, KING WILLIAM STREET, STRAND.

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## INTRODUCTORY.

---

'T is a hard thing to judge the past aright,  
Harder to judge the present, though it be  
Before our eyes in stern reality :  
Nought of the beautiful, the ideal, the bright,  
Haloes the things that meet the common sight :  
To find the lovely in the walks of life,  
The music of humanity in strife,  
Kindness in sternness, gentleness in might,  
May try the mind as much as to unfold  
The mouldering records of departed times,  
And more shall try the heart ; too warm, too cold,  
To judge of present hopes, and schemes, and  
crimes ;  
How changed will they appear throughout the gloom  
Of coming years—our life seen from our tomb !



## I.

TACITUS says that the Gauls peopled Britain; and the venerable Bede asserts that the first inhabitants came from Amorica. There are Danish traditions of expeditions from Jutland and the neighbouring coasts. The Welsh Triads say that before the race of Cymry came to Britain it had no people, but was occupied by "bears, wolves, beavers, and the oxen with the high prominence;" elks and wild boars were also numerous. Amid the solitudes of the Grampians, or the heights of Snowden and Cadir Idris, the eagle still remains, the last of Britain's primeval denizens.

## I.

## THE BEGINNING.

MAN to our island came ; but from what land  
Were the first wanderers ? Driven by adverse wind,  
And mourning for the homes they left behind,  
Perchance they came ; and on the silent strand  
They stood a lonely and deserted band :  
The startled eagle, screaming, left the shore,  
From the thick forest looked the tusky boar,  
While in the vale the stately elk reclined.  
Oblivion's stream hath swept all deeper trace,  
They lived, toiled, died, and on the fertile plain  
The rude descendent took his father's place,  
And felt his wants, and lived his life again :  
Saplings chance rooted in the mountain cleft,  
Seeds that the winds of time bore there and left.

## II.

THE Phenicians, in their commercial voyages, colonised many of the islands, and some of the coasts, of the Ægean and Mediterranean seas. Inscriptions in their language have been found in Malta. They occupied Spain, and founded Cadiz, and procured tin and lead from the British isles, a trade which they endeavoured studiously to conceal from the rest of the world. Some suppose that the religious system of the Druids was in part derived from the Phenicians, and that they introduced some of the arts of civilised life into Britain cannot be doubted.

## II.

## PROGRESS.

PROGRESS is nature's stamp on man ; the mark

Of his divine and his humanity ;

And dimly through the night of years we see  
Britain's first impulse onward : that strange bark  
Making its way across the billows dark

Of unknown seas, from far Phenicia's shore,

Another treasure bears than eastern store ;

Thoughts that the heart shall feel, words that the  
ear shall hark.

E'en as the tropic stream bears through the tide

Of icy seas the seed-grains of its home,

Man hath his conscious schemes of wealth and  
pride,

But his unconscious ones, where'er he roam,

Work through the outer ; o'er all life there lies

The soft, deep colouring of the heavenly skies.

## III.

THE system of the Druids began in Britain, and passed from thence into Gaul. None of their sacred mysteries were committed to writing, although they used the Greek character for common purposes: they believed in the immortality of the soul, and Cæsar says they taught many things concerning the stars and their motions; the size of the world and its countries; the nature of things; and the force and power of the immortal gods.

They were divided into three classes—Druids, Bards, and Vates.

## III.

## THE DRUIDS.

MAN's heart could listen then, as now, and hear

The voice of God that speaketh evermore ;

And he that hears must listen and adore ;

The softer tones might perish, those of fear

Alone would strike upon the inward ear.

The child in heart, rude sounds his bosom stirred,

The harmonious under-tones passed by unheard,

He bent his knee, but could not give a tear.

These different tones go sweeping by us now,

And stern and gentle hearts hear each a part ;

One veils his face before the awful brow

Of a dread sovereign ; one, with loving heart,

Looks to a father ; what the soul can stir

Changes the creed, but makes the worshipper.

## IV.

TACITUS says that Cæsar did not conquer Britain, but only showed it to the Romans; it was Agricola who completed its conquest, and who brought into extensive use the arts and luxury of Rome.

That the Britons at the time of Cæsar's invasion were not the barbarians they are sometimes represented, is evident; Cassivellaum had war-chariots when he opposed the Romans; and coined money was used by his successor Cunobelin, whose coins, with his name on them, have been found, and also one with a bard and harp upon it.

## IV.

## THE ROMANS.

DEAR to the Briton was his island home  
And the rude freedom that his fathers gave,  
But Cæsar's galleys float upon the wave,  
And Greek and Gaul have bowed their necks to  
Rome.

Yet on the beach all crimsoned rolls the foam,  
Ere on that shore the Roman dares to leap,  
Or the fell eagle broods o'er Dover's steep.  
But no rude valour then could Britain save.  
Years passed to ages, and the conqueror brought  
Luxurious arts—the forest disappeared  
Where Vates sacrificed, and Druids taught,  
And stately shrines to stranger gods were reared ;  
While for her slaughtered sons on Syria's plain,  
Or Danube's banks, the mother wept in vain.



## V.

LITTLE did the Roman philosopher, who contemptuously called Christianity the religion of an obscure sect, think, that in a few ages its churches should occupy the place of all the idol temples of Europe; as little did its humble and suffering followers suppose how changed its peaceful and loving doctrines would become in the hands of priests and monarchs.

## V.

## CHRISTIANITY.

Rome's clarion-blast had thundered through the air,  
And died with scarce an echo, when there rose  
A tone so soft, that 'mid the din of foes  
It was unheeded ; with the voice of prayer,  
The sighs that agony of woe declare,  
With lofty hymns of triumph and of trust,  
Proclaiming spirit sovereign over dust,  
It came, earth's melodies to mingle with and share.  
All the pure utterance of ages past,  
The words of sages, and the poet's song,  
It blended into music, best and last  
Of all God's voices ; as it floats along,  
Stirring the listening heart to deeds of love,  
To hope for man, to higher life above.

## VI.

IN 525, St. Deiniol founded a college at Bangor, which was raised to a bishopric about 550; it was destroyed by the pagan Saxons, 1071, and the monks cruelly murdered, but, in 1102, it was rebuilt by funds collected by a Synod held at Westminster for reforming the church. King John, in 1212, took the then bishop prisoner, whilst officiating at the altar, but released him on receiving a large ransom.

The remains of several Welsh princes lie in this cathedral. The tomb of Prince Owen Gryffrydd is still in a perfect state beneath an arched recess.

## VI.

## CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN.

OH! beautiful as light when down it streams  
Through cloudless ether, was the truth when  
taught

By the Great Master; but how soon it caught  
A tinge of earthly colouring; Grecian dreams,  
The Eastern's slavish fear, the mystic gleams  
Of light through darkness struggling in the soul  
That could not break an earlier creed's control,  
Obscured, though never quenched, its heavenly  
beams.

But purer far was that beclouded light  
Than aught before e'er seen in Britain's isle:  
Oft the lone wanderer in the wintry night  
Sought shelter in old Bangor's monkish pile,  
And by the wood-heaped fire then waning dim,  
Heard from the low-roofed church the Christian's  
hymn.

## VII.

BRITAIN, after its final abandonment by the Romans, about the year 410, appears to have become divided into a number of small republics, answering to the Roman districts into which it had been divided. These engaging in contests with each other, a number of petty tyrants arose, for we find Kings of Cornwall, Devonshire, Kent, Glastonbury, &c. Amid this incessant warfare, and the incursions of the Picts, Scots, and Saxons, many of the buildings erected by the Romans must have been destroyed. The corrupted civilisation of Rome, grafted on the barbarism of Britain, was not likely to produce good or lasting results.

## VII.

## CHANGE.

AT length they leave, those masters of the world,  
The northern island they so long have held ;  
The forest rose again their axes felled,  
Past the weed-covered fount the streamlet purled  
In its old bed ; and giant winter hurled  
As toys to his frost sons, the stones that spanned  
The vale or river, and spring's fairy wand  
Gave flowers to wave where banners had unfurled.  
They left the slave's dull heart and toiling hand,  
But not the mind to prompt, the will to do ;  
A hideous stupor brooded o'er the land,  
And storms alone, perchance, could health renew ;  
Dark truth, that fixes but a deeper blot  
On those who duty, nature, God forgot.

## VIII.

It is probable that the Saxons had for centuries visited and settled in Britain before the date fixed as the time of the arrival of Hengist, about 449. The Romans had an officer called the Count of the Saxon Coast, whose Government extended from near the present site of Portsmouth to Wells in Norfolk. The coming of Hengist and his brother seems to have been accidental, as they had but three small vessels with them. Nennius says they were exiles.

## VIII.

## THE SAXONS.—I.

THE polished Roman left how slight a trace,  
Compared to those wild rovers of the deep  
Whose language still, whose very thought we  
keep ;  
Rude thought, with nothing of Italian grace,  
But wild and wonderous as its native place,  
The fiords and the forests of the north,  
Where Winter's steeds the fierce winds hurry forth,  
And whirlpools boil, and mountain torrents leap.  
All men are brothers ; but as in one home  
Features and minds may differ, so one race  
Another does excel ; like ocean foam  
Nations have melted, and their vacant place  
Been filled by stronger minds, or hardier frames,  
While others blend like drops, and do but change  
their names.



## IX.

“THE Saxons were an agricultural and pastoral people; they required land for their alods—forests, marshes, and commons for their cattle. . . . Nor can we reasonably imagine that such spoils as could yet be wrested from the degenerate inhabitants were despised by conquerors whose principle it was that wealth was to be won at the spear’s point.”—See *Kemble’s “Saxons in England.”*

## IX.

## THE SAXONS.—II.

AND soon the polish and the splendour fled  
That Rome had brought; 't was of a southern  
birth,  
And would not root itself in northern earth;  
And from the Druid's uncouth cromlech spread  
The ivy to the Roman shrine, and wed  
Both to oblivion with its clasping rings;  
Another race, another sort of kings  
Than those in Cæsar's golden palace bred,  
Are on the shore; the sea-king's ocean-steed  
Bounds o'er the stormy wave; the Saxons come.  
In their own souls their destiny they read,  
And see in British vales their future home:  
By manly toil, by thought, by peace and strife,  
They made us England—theirs was inborn life.

## X.

THERE are passages of great beauty and of mysterious import in the Edda, as that which describes the "Twilight of the Gods," or the final conflict between the gods and the giants, when destruction shall overwhelm the universe, but from which a new creation shall emerge; so also that in the beginning of all things—"At the beginning of time there was nothing; neither land nor sea, nor foundations below; the earth was nowhere to be found: nor the heaven above: There was an infinite abyss, and grass nowhere."

## X.

## SAXON MYTHOLOGY.

IN the soft melody of winds and streams  
The voice of Deity the Grecian heard,  
And all the love of beauty in him stirred ;  
But the snow-girdled Hecla, with its gleams  
Of lurid flame, wake sterner, wilder dreams  
Within the Northman's heart, and, clothed with  
form,  
Became the polar frost, and fire, and storm,  
Things, living things to him, not as to us a word  
He looked around, and saw that mystery veiled  
All nature, and behind that veil, to him,  
There sat a Deity, and it he hailed,  
And bowed his rugged head and sinewy limb ;  
Not to luxurious gods could he resign  
His faith ; to him the strong was the divine.

## XI.

MANY indications exist of a spreading disbelief in their old faith, which prepared the northern nations for the reception of the nobler truths of Christianity. Bartholin has collected some instances of this kind. One warrior says that he trusted more to his strength and his arms than to Odin; another, "I do not wish to revile the gods, but Freya seems to me of no importance: neither she nor Odin are anything to us."

## XI.

## CHRISTIANITY RECEIVED BY THE SAXONS.—I.

THE time for change had come! what once had  
might

To sway the spirit and to bless the heart  
In that old faith had now fulfilled its part,  
And silently it passes into night;  
The horologe of time proclaimed the light  
Of Christian day was dawning; silently  
It rose above the heaving restless sea  
Of Saxon mind, and made its billows bright.  
Thus passed for ever Scandinavia's gods,  
As passed before the Greek's, and ere these died  
Egypt's had vanished from their rock-abodes,  
And the Assyrian's from the Tigris' side.  
Forms change, creeds alter, but the truth still lives,  
And to them all their power and beauty gives.

## XII.

“WHEN he (Edwin, King of Northumbria) inquired of the high priest (Coifi) who should first profane the altars and temples of their idols, with the enclosures that were about them, he answered, ‘I; for who can more properly than myself destroy those things which I worshipped through ignorance?’ . . . As soon as he drew near the temple he profaned the same, casting into it the spear which he held; . . . the place where the idols were is still shown, not far from York, to the eastward, beyond the River Derwent, and is now called Godmundingham.” \*—See *Bede's “Ecclesiastical History.”*

\* Or, “The home of the protection of the gods.” Its modern name is Goodmanham, East Riding of York.

## XII.

## CHRISTIANITY RECEIVED BY THE SAXONS.—II.

'T is easy on the accustomed path to tread,  
Worn by the feet of generations past;  
But he who treads it first, or treads it last,  
Venturing where all is silent as the dead—  
Or lingering there when all besides are fled—  
These are the lofty spirits who unfold  
New views of greatness, or preserve the old.  
Both noble, but by different natures led.  
The Saxon story tells of one who flung  
His fateful arrow at the idol's shrine,  
While others round the mouldering ruins hung,  
Whose desolation was to them divine:  
Types of two classes who must ever be  
Within a land that would be strong, yet free.



## XIII.

MERLIN, or more properly Merdhin, is supposed to have lived about the middle of the fifth century. Sharon Turner says, in his "Vindication of the Ancient British Poems," "I think I cannot more decisively prove that these were extant in the time of Giraldus' poems of the sixth century, and of Merlin, than by translating some passages from him on the subject, and adds from Giraldus, "The memory of Merlin's prophecies had been retained among the British bards, whom they call poets, verbally by many—in writing by very few." Merlin wrote a little poem, entitled "Avallenau; or, the Orchard," which contains many personal allusions, and a wild and touching account of a madness from which he suffered.

## XIII.

MERLIN.

AND what art thou?—an ideal of the great;  
The personation of a nation's thought;  
A giant figure by the ages wrought?  
Rather a man for whom time would not wait,  
But with rough hand consigned thee to the fate  
Of a rude people and untutored age,  
To bear the name of wizard, not of sage,  
To be a thing of fear, and doubt, and hate.  
Yet, wert thou not of nature's worshippers,  
And knelt beside her mountain altars—lone  
And silent—where the ocean-sounding firs  
Bent (like thy soul) upon their rocky throne,  
As the storm with its phantom-wings swept by,  
Bearing the voices of Eternity?

## XIV.

“ WHEN he (Augustine) had sat down, pursuant to the king’s commands, and preached to him and his attendants then present the word of life, Ethelbert answered thus:—‘Your words and promises are very fair, but they are new to us, and of uncertain import; I cannot approve of them so far as to forsake that which I have so long followed with the whole English nation. . . . We will not molest you, but give you favourable entertainment; . . . nor do we forbid you to preach and gain as many as you can to your religion.’”—*Bede’s “Ecclesiastical History.”*

## XIV.

ETHELBERT EXAMINING THE CHRISTIAN  
DOCTRINES.

NATURE hath mighty things, and what are they?

The avalanche, the earthquake, and the storm?

These for a while, but for a while deform ;

The mightiest things are those of every day,

That like great Time pass noiseless on their way :

The forest grows unheard, the mountain chain

Cycles in silence build, and then again

Crumble and mould it in another form.

'T is thus with mind, the greatest change it knows

From error unto truth, by patient thought,

Not noisy speech, within the spirit grows ;

Nor doth that earnest struggle lead to naught,

He who hath felt that truth is hard to reach,

Will for another's faults find gentle speech.

## XV.

ETHELBERT was king of Kent in 597; he had extended his dominions as far as the river Humber, by which the Southern Saxons were divided from the Northern. Before the arrival of Augustine, he had heard of the Christian religion from his queen, Bertha, who was a Frank. Bede says, "he compelled none to embrace Christianity. . . . For he had learned from his instructors and leaders to salvation that the service of Christ ought to be voluntary, not by compulsion."

## XV.

## ETHELBERT EMBRACES CHRISTIANITY.

Not from indifference, not with hasty tread,  
From Odin's altars turned that king away,  
The first beside the Christian shrine to pray;  
Pure was the light his moral influence shed.  
Calmly he waited till the mists had fled  
From the dark minds who still in faith could  
cling  
To their old altar as a sacred thing;  
And not from bigot zeal one victim bled.  
Colours must blend to form one stainless ray,  
And sounds, to make one perfect harmony,  
And many minds, each in a different way,  
The dark enigma of our being see,  
And from the strivings of the whole evolves  
An answer that sufficeth, though not solves.

## XVI.

EDWIN, at the age of three years, was driven from his paternal dominions of Deira by Ethelfrith, king of Northumbria; he was generously brought up by Cadvan in North Wales. On arriving at manhood he was compelled to leave Wales, and wandered many years in secret to escape Ethelfrith's pursuit. Being at length sheltered and assisted by Redwold, king of East Anglia, he obtained the throne of his unrelenting foe. Edwin fell in battle in his forty-eighth year, A.D. 633.

## XVI.

## THE GREAT EDWIN OF NORTHUMBRIA.—I.

I CALL thee great—as such, would honour thee,  
 Though history hath not titled thus thy name  
 (Oft to be 'mid her great ones is but shame);  
 True man thou wert, and no nobility  
 Could add a prouder title to the tree  
 Of thy ancestral lineage; king and sage  
 A brief memorial on a monkish page  
 Is all that fate hath given thy memory:  
 Yet 't is enough if we but look; the shell  
 Tells the rock's history, and the crumbling arch  
 The temple's date; and so it needs no swell  
 Of pompous words to trace through Time's rough  
     march  
 The great and good—dim shapes, but as we gaze,  
 Each form the human and the race displays.



## XVII.

THE vicissitudes of Edwin's early life had made him thoughtful and contemplative; he was more intellectual than any of the Anglo-Saxon kings who had preceded him. His history, related by the Venerable Bede, though brief, is full of interest. Having solicited the hand of the daughter of the Christian King of Kent, her brother objected to her marriage with a worshipper of Odin. Edwin promised not to interfere with her religion or that of her friends; and added, if he found on examination that Christianity was a religion more worthy of God than his old faith, he would himself adopt it.

## XVII.

## EDWIN OF NORTHUMBRIA.—II.

HE sat beside an antique shrine and thought .  
 Upon the past, as ever think the wise ;  
 From it the shapes of the dim future rise,  
 And out of it the present must be wrought :  
 A true response to many doubts he sought  
 From God, from nature, from his heart, and ne'er  
 Did these leave earnest questioner in despair ;  
 In thousand ways an answer may be brought.  
 Not upon nullities do nations live,  
 It is belief alone can give them power ;  
 He felt the present had but forms to give,  
 And the past taught him they but live their hour ;  
 "The twilight of the gods" hath come, he said,  
 And o'er us glooms Hel's \* empire of the dead.

\* Hel, or Hela, was the Scandinavian death-goddess.

## XVIII.

THE life of Edwin was attempted by an assassin commissioned by Cwichhelm, the pagan King of Wessex. Pretending to be a messenger from his king, he was admitted to Edwin's presence, and attacked him with a poisoned dagger. The king was unarmed, but a thane, to whom he was much attached, was near him; he saw the king's danger, and, having no shield, threw himself before his master, and received in his own body the blow which it was impossible to arrest.

## XVIII.

## THE THANE LILLA SAVING EDWIN.—III.

HADST thou been Greek, thy name had been en-  
shrined

In living song, and altars had been raised  
To thee,—loud history would have blazed  
Thy deed hadst thou been Roman ; but I find  
Few who know e'en thy name and how entwined

It is with nobleness ; we turn away  
From records of our country's early day  
As if it naught had held of heart or mind.  
Thou mad'st thy heart a buckler for thy king ;

Saxon, 't was nobly done ! and I am fain  
This slow, late-blooming flower of song to bring  
Unto thy grave ; tribute to thee, how vain,  
But not for us ; one worthy deed well read  
Thoughts can revive that common life keeps dead.

## XIX.

CAEDMON appears to have had the care of the cattle of the Abbey of Whitby during the time of Hilda. So far from appearing when young to possess the gift of song, when the harp was passed to him at convivial meetings, he would shrink away and withdraw in tears. One night having thus withdrawn, he laid down and slept; during his sleep a voice said to him "Caedmon, sing me something;" "I cannot sing," said he; "Yet thou must sing to me," said the voice; "What shall I sing?" "The origin of things." His short ode on the Creation is in Alfred's translation of Bede. He was admitted by Hilda among the company she had gathered round her, and died at Whitby, A.D. 680.

## XIX.

## CAEDMON THE ANGLO-SAXON POET.

THE ocean billows, and the rock-bound shore,  
The still, wide moorland, or the northern sky  
Of changing beauty, on his infancy  
Pressed with their silent influence evermore ;  
Childhood went by, then evening breezes bore  
From Hilda's gothic pile the chanted hymn,  
And in the cloister or the chapel dim  
Knelt the lone youth in silence to adore.  
Thus Nature trained him for his work through years  
With a wise sternness,—oft the starry night,  
On which he gazed with longing and wild tears,  
Seemed opening for him to the infinite,  
And thoughts and dreams his heart had kept, awoke,  
And the closed lips at last in music spoke.

## XX.

"ALMOST every monastery had its own historiographer or historian, whose business, or, at least, whose general practice, it was to copy the history of preceding times from those who were already known to have written them with success, and to continue the narrative during his own times, in his own words, to the best of his ability."—Preface to the "Saxon Chronicle," *Bohn's Antiquarian Library*.

## XX.

## THE CHRONICLER.

IN massive chair of oak-wood, rudely made,  
Sits a grey-headed monk, whose placid face  
Of time or passion shows but little trace ;  
Safe in that old secluded convent's shade,  
The world's rough conflict to his mind displayed  
Seems more a shifting picture, than a thing  
Of life reality ; its voices ring,  
But as an echo by the breezes stayed.  
Yet hath that still old man a kindly heart,  
Loving all gentle things, from bird and child  
To tree and flower ; and now he sits apart  
From monkish tattle in the sunshine mild,  
Noting the records of his times : aside  
He puts his vellum page with conscious pride.



## XXI.

THE place of Bede's birth is said by himself to have been in the territory afterwards given by King Egfred to Benedict Biscop, abbot of the united monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow; this abbot, who had formerly been a thane, was unwearied in the pursuit of knowledge and in ameliorating the condition of his country. He travelled four or five times to Rome, and brought to England not only literature but arts till then unknown; he was the first who brought masons and glaziers home with him, having need of them for the noble buildings which he erected. With this great and good man Bede was placed when he was seven years old, and at Wearmouth and at Jarrow he passed the rest of his life.

## XXI.

THE VENERABLE BEDE.—I.

ONCE by thy ruined but time-honoured cell  
In years gone by I stood ; I thought not then,  
For I was but a child, that ever pen  
Of mine should write thy name, or mine eyes dwell  
In interest on thy antique page,—yet well  
Hath memory kept that picture ; the mossed  
stones  
In the dull churchyard—e'en the north wind's  
tones,  
As from the distant past, seem round me still to  
swell.  
A book like thine is a most precious thing  
By mind bequeathed to mind ; it hath outlived  
Thousands that much of fame and wealth could bring  
For a brief space ; for he who wrote, believed,  
Aye, and believing words, whate'er they be,  
Have on them stamped an immortality.

## XXII.

"ON almost every occasion Bede gives the name and designation of his informant, being anxious, apparently, to show that nothing is inserted for which he had not the testimony of some respectable witness. The author received secondary evidence with caution: statements received through a succession of informants are always pointed out with scrupulous exactness, whatever opinion he may entertain, as in the case of some visions and miracles, of the credibility of the facts themselves." —Preface to "Bede's History," published by the *English Historical Society*, 1838.

## XXII.

## THE VENERABLE BEDE.—II.

WE call them childish fables that he tells ;

They are to us, they were not so to him.

The howl of demons, or the angel's hymn  
Heard in the lonely vigil ; and the hells  
Of fire and frost, where the dark spirit dwells,

Were things at which men shuddered and grew  
pale—

For they believed—untutored hearts must quail,  
Though they against the thralldom still rebel,  
Forgetting 'mid life's duties their dark creed :

And softly Nature's voices still are heard  
In that old history, and the heroic deed,

The patient suffering, or the truthful word,  
Thy hand did write, old monk, thy heart did feel,  
And it is these that do thyself reveal.

## XXIII.

" . . . . . he passed the day joyfully until the evening; and the boy above mentioned" (a youth to whom he was dictating his translation of the Gospel of John) "said to him, 'Dear master, there is one sentence not written.' He answered, 'Write quickly.' Soon after the boy said, 'The sentence is now written.' He replied, 'It is well, you have said the truth. It is ended; receive my head into your hands, for it is a great satisfaction to me to sit facing my holy place, where I was wont to pray, that I may also sitting call upon my Father.' And thus, on the pavement of his little cell, he breathed his last."—*Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede.*

He died on the 26th May, 735.

## XXIII.

## THE DEATH OF BEDE.—III.

SIMPLE and saintly as the histories told  
In holy writ, is one upon the page  
Of Saxon story in a darksome age ;  
It cometh like a whisper from that old  
And distant world, of what it did enfold,  
Of pure and gentle things, and cheers the heart  
Apt to grow sad when looking on one part  
Of that stern age, and men of Titan mould.  
I would not add one line to that old tale  
Fresh from a loving heart, it hath a power  
All foreign words would render poor and stale,  
A portion of the Past's unreckoned dower  
Bequeath it to the Future, for this age  
Writes few such stories on her tinsel page.

## XXIV.

THE Emperor Charlemagne cruelly persecuted the pagan Saxons in Germany to compel them to adopt the Christian faith; many of them fled to Jutland and became pirates, harassing for many years the coasts of France and Britain. They ever manifested a peculiar animosity against the priests, and destroyed the churches and monasteries. They first landed in England in 787.

## XXIV.

## THE NORTHMEN.

SPRUNG from a Saxon stock, by bigot zeal  
Forced from their homes they sought the Baltic  
shore,  
Where they might still their ancient gods adore ;  
Strange error ! to convert with fire and steel,  
And by the body's death the soul to heal ;  
The Anglo-Saxon heard Augustine's voice,  
Death or religion was the German's choice,  
They chose the first ; or saw their homes no more.  
Fierce and revengeful o'er the waves they sweep,  
The wild sea-kings of many a northern tale,  
And in their hearts a deadly hatred keep  
To Christian priests and creeds where'er they sail ;  
And thus for ever it will be through time :  
Truth is too holy to be helped by crime.



## XXV.

“ A.D. 870 . . . the same winter King Edmund fought against them, and the Danes got the victory and slew the king, and subdued all the land, and destroyed all the minsters they came to . . . . At that same time they came to Medeshamstede (Peterborough), and burned and beat it down, slew abbot and monks, and all that they found there. And that place, which before was full rich, they reduced to nothing.”—*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

## XXV.

DESTRUCTION OF THE ABBEY OF PETERBOROUGH  
BY THE NORTHMEN.

THE music of the vesper hymn had died  
In the hushed woodlands ; and o'er vale and hill  
The evening mist-clouds rested cold and still ;  
The wood-fire blazed within the chimney wide,  
Shedding its light afar ; a welcome guide  
It oft had been to weary serf, when day  
Closed o'er his steps ; to-night upon its way  
It leads a host that tears and force defied.  
The sun arose to shine on blackened walls,  
And echo answered back his steps who trod  
(The one survivor) through those silent halls,  
Seeking beside the altar of their God  
His slaughtered brethren, who had perished there,  
Unarmed and patient, by their shrine of prayer.

## XXVI.

“ ONE of the greatest boons that Christianity gave to the poor Saxon serf was the enjoyment of the Sabbath. The master who compelled his serf to work for him on that day could be obliged to give him his freedom.”—*Palgrave's "History of the Anglo-Saxons."*

## XXVI.

## UNDER-CURRENTS.

BUT silently beneath this noise and strife,  
    Worked countless energies of heart and head,  
    And men, the glooms of time have overspread,  
Nor left a single annal of their life;  
Who tells what savage shaped from ore the knife?  
    Toil for the good of man, but ask not fame,  
    Ages may bless thy work, not know thy name,  
No good once done time in the dust can tread.  
The marsh is drained, the yellow harvest waves  
    Where the lone heron watched the lazy stream,  
Wood-lighted hearths were there, flower-sprinkled  
    graves,  
    And love and hope; 't was life, and not a dream,  
And that blest gift to wearied man from heaven  
Came to the toil-worn serf—one day of rest in seven.

## XXVII.

A LARGE portion of the Anglo-Saxon population was in slavery during their pagan state, but, after the diffusion of Christianity, a regard for its benevolent precepts, affection for those who had formed part of their households, and sometimes superstition (as in the case where two slaves are freed for the good of an abbot's soul), caused emancipation to proceed rapidly. As serfs were allowed to accumulate property, they often redeemed themselves and their families.

## XXVII.

## THE SERF.

MASTER and slave ! strange words are those to hear  
Among a family of brethren named,  
Within a world a father's goodness framed,  
Harsh 'mid its harmonies upon the ear  
They fall ; conjuring up every shape of fear  
That haunts the oppressor or the oppressed's  
path,  
Pride, avarice, cruelty, revenge, and wrath ;  
All that from misery wrings the bitterest tear ;  
All that brings into human hearts the blight  
Of selfishness, before whose poisonous breath  
Love's flowers droop withering, and day fades to  
night,  
And the great gift of life turns to a death ;  
War's hurricane sweeps past, but while we sleep  
Slavery's dark vapours poison as they creep.

## XXVIII.

THE form used in liberating a serf was simple and striking ; giving him a shield and spear, they placed him on the highway, and bid him go wherever he pleased, to the right hand or to the left.

A law passed by the great Alfred, and Witenagemot, contributed much to lessen the number of the servile class ; it was enacted that no one could buy a Christian slave for more than six years,—on the seventh he should depart free, without payment, and with the wife and clothes he had at first.

## XXVIII.

## THE SERF FREED.

"BE free," they said, and placed within his hand  
The shield and spear, and bid him choose his  
way,

And the serf stood a freeman from that day,  
With right to feel an interest in the land,  
With right to call his own that household band  
His wife and children ; and to feel he trod  
With brothers the great universe of God :  
A slave, he did but there an atom stand.  
Proud souls there were that chafed beneath the yoke,  
Mild hearts that pined in hopelessness away,  
Fierce spirits that the galling thralldom broke,  
And minds that meanest passions made their sway :  
Yet one dark circle fettered all ; one doom ;  
Life without progress ; death without the tomb.



## XXIX.

IN 721 Ina, after a prosperous reign of thirty-seven years, resigned the crown, and with his queen went to live in Rome. He there founded a Saxon school for the instruction of his countrymen. Ina and his queen after their retirement lived in humble seclusion: he often laboured with his own hands for their support. He published a collection of laws in the early part of his reign, which still exist; Ina died at Rome.

## XXIX.

## INA RESIGNING HIS CROWN.

DID he do well and wisely, who resigned  
For a monk's cowl the monarch's jewelled crown,  
And from a throne to humblest life came down ?  
If to avoid the thorns within it twined  
Is the best motive for the deed we find,  
Not saint but coward, is the name to give,  
He who for others' good refused to live ;  
But yet no fear of toil could daunt the mind,  
Methinks, of that old chief—no, deep within  
The darkened mind there is a want of God,  
A longing for the pure, a sense of sin,  
A loathing of the guilty path once trod,  
Then to some unknown goal it wildly springs,  
Thinking sin mixed with all familiar things.

## XXX.

IN 688, Ceadwalla travelled to Rome on pilgrimage ; some years after two other Anglo-Saxon kings, Cenred of Mercia, and Offa of Essex, resigned their crowns, pilgrimaged to Rome, and became monks : Offa is described as a most amiable youth.

“ A.D. 883. And that same year Sighelm and Athelstan went to India on pilgrimage to St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew.”—See “ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.”

## XXX.

## THE PILGRIM.—I.

PEACE, peace, is what I crave, the last, best gift

Man seeks on earth, for joy I ask not now,

It sitteth ill upon a furrowed brow :

As o'er life's ebbing sea away I drift,

Oft to the spirit-land mine eyes I lift,

And ask if there be peace, if there at last

To calm shall sink fierce passion's howling blast ;

It now from point to point doth only shift.

I have done all that I was told to do :

Barefooted, lonely, I have gone my way,

My fearful pilgrimage is travelled through,

Yet I remember but one peaceful day,

It was when in my face a little child

Whose lamb I saved, looked into it and smiled.

## XXXI.

SVEIN, the eldest son of Godwin, and brother to Harold the Saxon, to obtain peace to his guilty conscience, walked with naked feet from Flanders to Jerusalem. Six years before he had murdered his cousin Beorn; but it is not to any particular person I refer in the three sonnets entitled "The Pilgrim,"—they are but an endeavour to give utterance to thoughts that may have passed through many minds.

## XXXI.

## THE PILGRIM.—II.

HAVE I done well the priest alone to hear,  
Are there no teachers but the tongues of men,  
No voices on the mountains, in the glen,  
No tones but enter by the outward ear ?  
My heart ne'er conjured up such shapes of fear  
As men have pictured to me, nature tells  
Another story in her silent dells,  
*There*, to mine eye hath come the unbidden tear.  
They told me of my immortality :  
I felt it on the mountains ; He who reared  
Their giant frame-work, He, too, moulded me,  
And the enduring to my soul endeared,  
And voices sound, as from the deeps of space,  
“ Still ever onward, upward, is thy race.”

## XXXII.

“It must be admitted that nowhere did Christianity make a deeper or more lasting impression than in England. Not only do we see the high nobles, and the near relatives of kings among the bishops and archbishops, but kings themselves—warlike and fortunate kings—suddenly and voluntarily renouncing their temporal advantages, retiring into monasteries, and abdicating their crowns, that they may wander as pilgrims to the shrines of the apostles in Rome. Well-descended men cannot rest until they have carried the tidings of redemption into barbarous lands, a spectacle which compels us to believe in the deep, earnest, conscientious spirit of self-sacrifice and love of truth which characterised the nation.”—*Kemble's “Saxons in England.”*

## XXXII.

## THE PILGRIM.—III.

I WILL resign thee to the earth again,  
Thou mouldering skull, to ever muse on thee  
Fits not a soul for its high destiny;  
Changed by the sunbeam and the gentle rain,  
I shall perchance behold thee on the plain  
A many-coloured flower, and thou shalt tell  
Thy tale of change, not death, and in my cell  
By the deep-meaning cross thy place regain.  
I mused on death until the world appeared  
One mighty charnel-house, I read decay  
On rock and flower alike, all nature weird  
Of doom, but now through life I take my way,  
Changed amid changing things ; another fate  
Would leave the heart lone, seared, and desolate.



## XXXIII.

ALFRED of Northumbria, whom Eddius calls "the most wise," was educated by Wilfred. His youngest brother being raised to the throne by the Northumbrian Witenas, he retired into Ireland that he might there pursue his studies in religion and philosophy. After fifteen years of retirement he was called to the throne on the death of his brother Egfred in 684.

## XXXIII.

ALFRED OF NORTHUMBRIA.—I. RETIREMENT.

FIRST of the Saxon kings whom learning led  
 From courts and camps unto her sacred cell,  
 And bid him there in studious quiet dwell.  
 The crown that almost glittered on his head,  
 The power for which men toil and sin, all fled,  
 Like shadows of unreal things, before  
 The prophet's song, the sage's thoughtful lore,  
 And high communings with the mighty dead.  
 Thus years passed by, and not in vain they past;  
 Stronger his mind and purer grew his heart,  
 And when to life's stern work he comes at last,  
 Not back from duty doth he idly start :  
 He who hath learnt obedience in his youth  
 Is fit to rule, and judge himself of truth.

## XXXIV.

"THOUGH Alfred was attached to the studies of the clergy, he was not their indiscriminating instrument. He had made his early instructor, Wilfred, a bishop ; but when, in his opinion, that prelate was unduly pressing points which he disapproved, he remained immovable in what he thought right ; nor could the urgencies of Pope John VII. shake his determination. He reigned over the province which his knowledge enlightened, and his virtues cherished, for nineteen years."—See *Sharon Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons."*

## XXXIV.

ALFRED OF NORTHUMBRIA.—II. SELF-RELIANCE.

AND so he did, nor weakly bowed his mind  
 To priest or prelate ; he has earned the right  
 To think and act alone by inner might :  
 The pleasant memories of the past were twined  
 With Wilfred's name, but not e'en that could bind  
 The self-reliant one, or make him yield  
 His mental freedom ; and if that but shield,  
 The soul an onward, upward, way will find.  
 Freedom of mind ! it is a thing unknown ;  
 Chains strong as adamant, unseen as air,  
 Are round our spirits, and they least will own  
 The bondage, who have learnt the chain to wear,  
 Till of themselves it hath become a part,  
 Gnawing and rusting to the inmost heart.

## XXXV.

IN 627 Paulinus built the first Christian church in Northumbria; it was of wood, and also another of stone at Lincoln; in 676 Benedict erected the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow. Wilfred, who had travelled to Rome, built in 709 the church of Ripon, and one at Hexham, which was superior to any building on this side the Alps. The Abbey of Croyland was erected on a vast number of piles of oak and alder, on account of the marshy nature of the ground, and earth was brought in boats, nine miles, to be mixed with the timber and marsh to complete the foundation: it was built in 716.

## XXXV.

## THE MONASTERY.

NOT useless, in that age of war and strife,  
    Rose in the sheltered vale the sacred pile;  
    There might the homeless stranger rest awhile,  
Or peaceful merchant scape the robber's knife;  
There the crushed heart might seek again for life;  
    For there are crimes and woes the heart and God  
    Alone should know, and cloisters might be trod  
By feet that slid on paths with pleasure rife.  
The man of action, and the man of thought  
    Alike are needful for a nation's weal;  
In softer times may other cells be sought  
    Than could be found in days of Saxon steel,  
But when the northern vi-king rode the wave,  
The cloister was a home, and not a grave.

## XXXVI.

THE betrothed husband of Ethelberga had been treacherously murdered by her father, Offa of Mercia; she fled from her home to the Abbey of Croyland. Many years after, she saved the life of Wiglaf, king of Mercia, by concealing him in her cell from the search of Egbert, until the negotiations of the venerable Abbot of Croyland effected a reconciliation between them, A.D. 777.

## XXXVI.

ETHELBERGA.

HOME, love, and faith in God and man were gone,

She neither hoped nor feared to live or die ;

Around her pressed a chilling vacancy,

And through it ever sounded but one tone,

The knell of the young heart, " thou art alone ; "

She fled, and He who guides the swallow's wing

O'er pathless oceans to the climes of spring

To the one goal still left, guided the wanderer on.

And there the storm-uprooted flower revived,

And blossomed in pale beauty, and the heart

Learned that its holiest treasures yet survived,

And earthly things still claimed of it a part ;

Till in her narrowed sphere of life at rest,

She made of earth a spot, more bright and blest.



## XXXVII.

THE Anglo-Saxon freemen were often servants, but their rights and liberties were protected by law. Whoever put a freeman into bonds was to forfeit twenty shillings: he might lose his freedom by crime; one thus reduced to slavery was called a "*wite theow*," a penal slave.

## XXXVII.

## THE BENIGHTED CEORL.

THROUGH the bare forest rushes past the wind,  
Autumn's last leaves are trampled into clay,  
And the night closes o'er a gloomy day:  
Woe to yon ceorl, who o'er the moors must find  
His way alone! he hears, though far behind,  
Amid the hurried pauses of the blast,  
The wolf's long howl;—Speed on, thy strength  
may last,  
And the limbs prove as faithful as the mind.  
Inured to danger, strong from active toil,  
This was no thing to daunt his hardy soul;  
Yet had it fears that in a viewless coil  
Bound it within a dread and stern control.  
He stops; though speed is life, before his sight  
A phantom rises from the realm of night!

## XXXVIII.

THE principal duties of the Saxon Witena-gemot were, to determine the succession to the throne, to make laws conjointly with the king, and assist him in making military preparations. Impeachments of great men were made before the Witena, and examinations made by it into the state of the churches, monasteries, and their possessions: grants of lands were made and confirmed; and inquiries made respecting the morals of the clergy. In 903, an ealdorman stated that his title-deeds had been destroyed by fire, and applied to the Witena to have new ones, which were ordered to be made out to him, as nearly similar to the former as memory could make them.

## XXXVIII.

## THE WITENA MEETING AT EASTER.

'T WAS early spring, the yellow catkins waved  
Upon the willows by the Thames' clear stream,  
For then untainted in the sunny beam,  
Deep, still, and full it flowed; then shy birds laved  
In its pure waters, and the lilies paved  
Its surface with broad leaves and golden flowers;  
For time to Nature gives his different dowers,  
What she had once, she never more must crave.  
Slow winding by those silent banks appeared  
High-born ealdorman, thane, and uncouth knight,  
Grave citizens for wisdom, too, revered,  
Chosen to plead before the great for right,  
And guard alike with care their country's weal  
From hidden treason, or from Danish steel.

## XXXIX.

“AMONG the Anglo-Saxons, land held in common was designated by the names of Mark, and Gâ, or Shire. The smallest of these common divisions is the mark or march (*mearc*); the next in order to the private estates or alods of the markmen, as its name denotes, it is something marked out or defined, having settled boundaries. It is the plot of land on which a greater or lesser number of free men have settled for the purposes of cultivation, and for the sake of mutual profit and protection; and it comprises a portion both of arable land and pasture, in proportion to the numbers that enjoy its produce.”—*Kemble's “Saxons in England.”*

## XXXIX.

## THE MARKMAN'S COTTAGE.—I.

MENDING his hunting-spear before the fire  
The markman sits, while at her graceful task  
His young wife plies the wheel; before them bask,  
On the warm hearth, the stag-hounds, stained with  
mire  
From the day's chase, for none then dared inquire  
Of the free Saxon why he roamed the woods,  
And tracked the wild deer to its solitudes,—  
It was a right bequeathed him by his sire.  
“I hear a voice,” she says, and bends her head,  
Yet listening as she whispered; “hearken thou,  
Is it the demon calling up the dead  
To walk the earth awhile?” upon her brow  
Cold drops were gathering, when before them stood  
A form as wild as goblin of the wood.

## XL.

It was about the year 981 that the Icelanders discovered Greenland. Eric the Red, being condemned to banishment on account of a murder he had committed, fitted out a vessel and told his friends he would go and seek the land which one Gunbian said he had seen. His son Leiss afterwards discovered Vinland or America. The account of the discovery of Vinland was committed to writing eighty years before Columbus visited Iceland to obtain nautical information.

## XL.

## THE MARKMAN'S COTTAGE.—II.

It was a wearied man, and that gave claim  
To ask for human sympathy and aid ;  
Fresh faggots on the smouldering fire were laid ;  
The board was spread ; and by the mounting flame  
The stranger's face is scanned ; and then his name,  
Country, and errand asked : he tells the tale  
Of the Red Eric, whom the stormy gale  
Of northern regions could not daunt or tame.  
The tasks are put aside, the busy wheel  
Ceases its humming, and the unfinished spear  
Rests on the floor, and closer to him steal  
His listeners, as he tells the wild career  
Of the old northmen, whom the ocean bore  
First on its icy waves to Greenland's shore.



## XLI.

As early as 692, missionaries left England to teach the Pagan nations of the Continent; in that year Willebrad, and eleven companions with him, went to Heligoland and Friesland. In 715 Boniface preached to the Thuringians and Hessians. And, besides others, Adalbert, son of a king of the Northumbrian kingdom of Deira, in 790, went to Germany for the same purpose.

## XLI.

## TRUE WORKERS.

FORTH from their homes they went, a simple band,

To toil in heathendom ; no cumbrous plan

Fettered the movements of the earnest man ;

Faith had he in his soul, and in his hand,

And needed not to work what others planned :

It is a living soul, and not a thing

Of mechanism, to which hearts will cling,

Or that to life can rouse a dying land.

There is more power in one deep truthful word,

One honest, noble deed, than in all schemes

That men have planned, whose hearts no faith hath  
stirred,—

More power in one great poet's glorious dreams

Than in a thousand systems hard and cold,

That but the mortal, not the man unfold.

## XLII

EGBERT was left early to the care of his mother, his father being dead. His talents excited the fears of the reigning King of Wessex, and Egbert was obliged to seek refuge in exile: he went to Charlemagne, with whom he remained some years, diligently improving the advantages that a residence at the Frankish Court afforded. His sisters were sent to the Continent to be educated, and there they became nuns.

## XLII.

## THE MOTHER OF EGBERT.

'T WAS a rude pile, although a noble dame  
Called it her home ; upon the Kentish shore,  
Sheltered by hills that ever hear the roar  
Of ocean waves, it stood ; they are the same,  
Those hills and waters, changed alone in name  
Since that sad mother, in her silent hall,  
Watched on the rush-spread floor the shadows fall,  
And murmured low h'er absent children's name :  
" My hearth is dreary as my heart is lone,  
For all are gone that made my pleasant cheer—  
Some convent cells, and one the churchyard stone  
Have covered up from life ; and thou, so dear  
Because the last, art now an exile gone,  
And my eyes ne'er shall look thy face again upon."

## XLIII.

WHEN Egbert, after three years of exile, was called to fill the throne of Wessex, he governed with great ability and moderation, and it was more by the influence of his mind than the force of arms that he ultimately became sole king of the West-Saxons: he was the most distinguished of all their monarchs before Alfred the Great, but there does not seem any proof that he was ever denominated King of all England, as sometimes asserted: he began to reign in 800, and died 836.

## XLIII.

EGBERT.

BEFORE his powerful genius had bowed down  
The Saxon princes ; and he reigned alone,  
Gathering around the yet unsettled throne  
The wisest of the land ; years ere the crown  
Begirt his thoughtful brow, Fate's adverse frown  
Had driven him forth an exile ; but the strong  
Can wring a good from suffering—e'en from  
wrong ;  
And Egbert, wanderer through each land and town  
Of ancient story or of rising power,  
Learned lessons that, within his native isle,  
No books had ever taught him, and no hour  
Of silent study in the cloistered pile.  
By years of toil, as well as days of thought,  
Must the perfection of the soul be wrought.

## XLIV.

ETHELWULPH succeeded his father Egbert in 836 : he had been a monk, and left the cloister to ascend the throne ; he had a mild disposition, but was of inferior abilities ; he possessed, however, in Alstan, Bishop of Sherborne, a great and wise minister, who had been the friend of his father Egbert, and who had the rare fortune to enjoy his preferments for fifty years. Ethelwulph, while a monk, appears to have lived in the monastery at Winchester.

## XLIV.

ETHELWULPH LEAVING THE CLOISTER.—I.

'T WAS an old chapel, and a sunny ray  
Gleamed through the window's tracery of stone,  
And fell upon a monk who sat alone  
Upon the altar-steps; from evening grey  
He there had watched till night had passed away;  
But now he rises, and the cowl and gown,  
All but the cross, with reverence slow lays down;  
Then with a freer step goes forth his way.—  
Egbert's last son—he must not tarry there;  
Once more in life again he takes his place,  
But the heart's conflict hath been long and drear,  
And marked with deeper lines his pallid face;  
For Nature's voice, that whispered he did right,  
Oft he had thought a demon's in that night.



## XLV

ETHELWULPH'S first wife was Osberga, the daughter of Oslac, his cupbearer; she was the mother of Alfred the Great, and a woman of intellect and virtue; but she died when her celebrated son was a child. The northmen, though often repulsed, continued to make frequent incursions. "853 . . . . King Ethelwulph sent his son Alfred to Rome, 855. This year the heathen men, for the first time, remained one winter in Sheppey. And the same year he (Ethelwulph) went to Rome in great state, and dwelt there twelve months, and then returned homewards, and Charles, King of the Franks, gave him his daughter to wife."—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

## XLV.

## ETHELWULPH.—II.

AROUSE thee, Ethelwulph, it is no time  
For monkish dreams; not thus thy father  
dreamed

Irresolute, when o'er the ocean streamed  
The northmen's banners: want, distrust, and crime,  
Are hovering o'er thy land, and in their prime  
Fate dooms thy sons to die—all, save that one,  
Who, calmly mounting on the shattered throne,  
Shall make it like himself, time-honoured and  
sublime.

I see beside thee kneel a princely child,  
Thy youngest, best-beloved, and o'er his head  
Thy hands are stretched to bless, loving and mild  
He bends before thee, then there comes the tread  
Of armed attendants, and to wondrous Rome  
They bear the young chief from his island home.

## XLVI.

WHEN Wiglaf, who had been allowed to retain Mercia as a tributary vassal of Egbert, heard of the death of the noble-minded but unfortunate Ethelberga, who had sheltered him in her cell at Croyland, he was so overcome by grief that it brought on sickness that confined him to his bed, and it was with difficulty that he could be withdrawn from her grave. In her tomb he buried his wife and son.

## XLVI.

## THE TOMB OF ETHELBERGA.

THY story conjures up a thousand things  
Of mournful gentleness ; true woman, thou  
Of the brave heart, the sad but thoughtful brow :  
How to the human all the human clings,  
For while the echo of past warfare rings  
Upon the ear as discord, sweetly steals  
The tone that aught of mortal love reveals,  
Or grateful sorrow's soft rememberings.  
A truest shrine was thy low tomb, for there  
Love buried its best treasures, and such tears  
As men alone can weep, bedewed it ; rare  
Were such pure drops amid the strifes and fears  
Of that dark age,—aye, they are rare e'en now,  
Though fashion frames soft words and smooths the  
brow.

## XLVII.

"A.D. 837. And the same year Ethelhelm the Ealdorman fought against the Danish army at Portland-isle with the men of Dorset, and for a good while he put the enemy to flight; but the Danish-men had possession of the field, and slew the Ealdorman."—*Saxon Chronicle*.

In A.D. 868, Algar and five other chiefs, with a few followers, had by their valour and skill nearly defeated the Danes, when the rash bravery of their men involved them all in destruction. They had devoted themselves by a religious ceremony to die for their country, and all perished.

## XLVII.

## ANGLO-SAXON PATRIOTS.

Who sleep beneath thy earth, my native land ?  
The wise, the brave, who gladly died for thee—  
How many perished ere thou couldst be free !  
In the far distant past I see a band  
Of Saxon patriots like a bulwark stand  
Against the Danish hordes, till, one by one  
Hewed down but unsubdued, they all are gone :  
That place is holy as Thermopylæ.  
There waves the yellow corn, and a clear rill  
Goes singing on beneath the summer skies,  
And children wander at their own wild will,  
Free as the wind that fans them as it flies ;  
But if no suffering there had ever been,  
Far other sights than these our eyes had seen.

## XLVIII.

ALFRED was sent by his father to Rome when he was four years old; he travelled by land through France, across the Alps, with a large retinue. In his seventh year he attended his father again a second time to Italy, and remained a year in Rome. He is said by some chroniclers to have had delicate health, and to have been sent into Ireland when a child, and placed there under the care of a religious lady called Modwenna.

## XLVIII.

ALFRED THE GREAT.—I. THE CHILD.

TRUE, he was but a child, but a child's heart  
Is a strange mystery, clear but fathomless,  
Knowing but little of itself, we less ;  
Bright things it holds, but then it hath no art  
To bring them forth into the world's great mart,  
So like the pearls of ocean there they dwell,  
Glistening in beauty in a closed shell :  
And painted there and never to depart  
Are nature's scenes, that daily, silently,  
She places deeper in the inmost heart ;  
And like sun-pictures, that we never see  
Till shaded from the light that bade them start  
Into strange beauty, 't is amid the strife  
Of manhood, that we view our scenes of early life.



## XLIX.

"HE (Alfred) was loved by his father and mother, and even by all the people, above all his brothers. . . . As he advanced through the years of infancy and youth, his form appeared more comely than that of his brothers; in look, in speech, in manners, he was more graceful than they. . . . He was a zealous practiser of hunting in all its branches, and hunted with great assiduity and success."—*Asser's "Life of Alfred."*

## XLIX.

## ALFRED THE GREAT.—II. REMEMBRANCES.

It could not be that he had trod in vain,  
 A thoughtful child, beneath the cloudless sky,  
 That overhangs with deep blue canopy,  
 Rome's glorious temples; they would rise again  
 'Mid the dark forest, or the marshy plain  
 Of his cold isle, to fill those waking dreams  
 That bless the care-worn with their golden  
     gleams;  
 Fair memories of the things that give no pain.  
 Those long, bright, summer hours of idleness,  
 To which thou, world way-farer, turn'st thy gaze,  
 Have done for thee what thou nor I can guess;  
 Think them not lost, those idle, wandering days,  
 They are bright colours 'mid that web of gloom  
 That time is ever weaving for the tomb.

## L.

"AT the same time the above-named Alfred, king of the West-Saxons, with a few of his nobles, and certain soldiers and vassals, used to lead an unquiet life among the woodlands of the county of Somerset, in great tribulation; for he had none of the necessaries of life. . . ."—*Asser's "Life of Alfred."*

Alfred suffered much from sickness during the whole of his life.

## L.

## ALFRED THE GREAT.—III. ADVERSITY.

WE wish to those we love skies ever clear,  
Long summer-days, and pathways strewed with  
flowers :

Best lessons are not learn'd in such bright hours ;  
The dark must teach them ; through the dimming  
tear

The spirit-land looks beautiful and near ;

Such hours the soul does to itself reveal,  
And we the mystery of our being feel,  
And shapes of beauty from the gloom appear.  
No true and noble heart was ever reared

Amid soft things ; it may be pain or want,  
Or sorrow o'er the grave of those endeared,

Or that mysterious woe the soul can plant  
Within itself,—but sorrow there must be,  
Ere it can struggle to the high and free.

## II.

THE wife and children of Hastings twice fell into the hands of Alfred ; the second time the King was urged to put them to death, to punish Hastings for his perfidy, but Alfred refused, loaded them with presents, and again sent them free to his fierce and persevering foe.

## LI.

ALFRED THE GREAT.—IV. RELEASING THE WIFE  
AND CHILDREN OF HASTINGS THE NORTHMAN.

PROUDLY she stood before him, but her eye  
Was bent upon her children, and she prest  
Their hands with such a grasp, that they repress  
Scarcely their tears, and turned to ask her why ;  
But her fixed look of tearless agony  
Took away words or motion, and those fears  
Gave to the child what they refused the mother  
—tears ;  
She gazed with pallid lip and eyelids dry.  
At last she looks on him upon whose tongue  
Hung death or freedom ; on his chair was laid  
An antique book, and by its side was hung  
His harp and sword. “Lady, be undismayed,”  
He rose and said, “be happy and be free ;  
Who ever thought that I could injure thee ?”

## LII.

FOR three years Hastings had contended against Alfred, determined, if possible, to obtain a territory in England for himself and his roving band, but the ability of the Saxon King at last compelled him to withdraw: some of his followers settled in East-Anglia, some in Northumbria, and others, escaping to their vessels, crossed the ocean, and sailed up the Seine. Hastings obtained a small territory from the French King. The *Saxon Chronicle* says, "Thanks be to God the army (the Danes) had not utterly broken down the English nation;" but it had suffered much, and also from a mortality both amongst men and cattle.

## LII.

ALFRED THE GREAT.—V. ROMNEY MARSH, KENT.

THE fisher's boat rocks idly on the sea,  
The sheep are resting on the grassy hill,  
Where village children wander at their will,  
Blithe as the singing birds, almost as free;  
And are these all the thoughtful man can see  
Where once intrepid Alfred and his band  
Drove the fierce Northman from the Kentish  
strand?

Fair is the scene, yet other things there be  
Than meet the eye; and with this seeming good  
How much of evil mingles, who may say?  
Rightly we shudder at those days of blood;  
But ignorance and crime still bar the way,  
And avarice hugs his bags of golden dust,  
And long repose brings idlesse and false trust.



## LIII.

DENEWULF, or Denulf, the peasant who sheltered Alfred in his cottage when he was a fugitive amid the marshes of Athelney, was afterwards munificently rewarded by the King, who, observing that Denulf was a man of talent, persuaded him to apply to letters; he became an ecclesiastic, and died Bishop of Winchester in 909.

## LIII.

DENULF.

FROM a small lamp a single thread of light  
Fell on the lettered page on which he bent  
A calm, high forehead, and an eye intent :  
Thus had he sat for hours, nor marked their flight ;  
But his mind wandered now, for silent night  
Unrolled for him the records of the past,  
And deeper thoughts came crowding, thick and  
fast,  
Than the old Roman on his page could write ;  
For none like memory writes for us, and none  
Can read its record but ourselves, and he  
Was thinking there, upon that bench of stone,  
Of his rude home beneath the forest tree.—  
He sighed ; for who unmoved reviews the past,  
Which yet he asks not back, nor wished, when here,  
to last.

## LIV.

ETHELFLEDA, or Ethelfled as she is called in the *Saxon Chronicle*, was the eldest child of Alfred the Great; she was one of the most distinguished persons of her time, and greatly assisted her brother Edward, by her courage and ability, in repressing the Danes. After the death of her husband, to whom her father had committed the care of London after it had been rebuilt (it having been nearly destroyed by the Danes), she bore the title of the Lady of Mercia.

## LIV.

WOMAN.—I. ETHELFLEDA, THE DAUGHTER OF  
ALFRED.

WOMAN hath trodden every path of life,  
Though to her nature strange ; priestess or queen,  
To whom men looked in reverence, she hath been ;  
Leader of armies in heroic strife,  
Champion for truth when error hath been rife,—  
All these, and more, she hath been, and may be,  
And out of these may work in harmony  
That deeper life of hers, the life unseen :  
And that true life, how doth the outer touch,  
And make or mar it !—'t is a gift to all,  
A solemn gift, that equalises much  
That we think differing, and call great or small.  
What are the things that give thee inner might ?  
These are the great, the rest are rust and blight.

## LV.

ETHELFLEDA had been very carefully educated by her father along with her brother Edward. Between the years 910 and 916 she built nine fortresses ; the last she erected was one at Runcorn, in Lancashire. She died in 918, after having governed Mercia for eight years, and was buried within the east porch of St. Peter's Church, at Gloucester.

## LV.

## WOMAN.—II. ETHELFLEDA.

WORKING 'mid humble cares and petty strife  
The routine of thine unheroic days,  
Things that deserve not aught of blame or praise,  
Perhaps they seem, that make the daily life  
Of thee as woman, mistress, mother, wife ;  
So are they, if we look at them alone,  
Not at the reflex image by them thrown  
Upon the soul, and lightened by their rays.  
Let but thy life be true, nor think it mean,  
Thy home is not the prison of thy soul ;  
Beyond its narrow bounds fair things are seen,  
And, circling it, eternal oceans roll :  
Thine be the beauty that the earth still holds,  
And the divine that mortal life enfolds.

## LVI.

ETHELGIVA was the third child of Alfred the Great; she became a nun. “. . . . Another monastery also was built by the same King (Alfred) as a residence for nuns, near the eastern gate of Shaftsbury, and his own daughter Ethelgiva was placed in it as abbess. With her many other noble ladies, bound by the rules of the monastic life, dwelt in that monastery. These two (the one for nuns at Shaftsbury, and the other for monks at Athelney) were enriched by the King with much land, as well as personal property.”—*Asser's "Life of Alfred."*

## LVI.

## WOMAN.—III. ETHELGIVA THE NUN.

THEY had one home, they saw one mother's smile,  
One father blessed them with his deep, strong  
heart,  
Yet in the world their lives how far apart!  
One toiled and thought with men; a convent pile  
Was Ethelgiva's narrow world meanwhile;  
Was it too narrow for the gaze it filled,  
And had the heart's loud beatings to be stilled  
With many an oft-repeated fruitless wile?  
Her life is but a line upon the page  
Of Ethelfleda's story, yet it may  
Have left its impress on that distant age,  
For the true-hearted live not for their day,  
And words that pure lips breathe, like winged seeds,  
May spring in glorious thoughts, or worthy deeds.



## LVII.

"891 . . . . In the same year three chosen men of Hibernian race, burning with piety, leave their country; they privately form a boat by sewing ox-hides; they put into it provisions for a week; they sail seven days and seven nights and arrive on the shores of Cornwall, and set out for the court of King Alfred; from thence they proceed to Rome, and, as is customary with teachers of Christ, they essay to go thence to Jerusalem."—*Ethelwerd's Chronicle*.

They are also named in the Saxon Chronicle; they were called Dubslane, Macbeth, and Maclinum, and are said to have been skilled in arts and letters.

## LVII.

## THE THREE PILGRIMS.

IN the rude ages, earth had shrines, where men  
Knelt down and prayed ; and spots where man  
forgot,

Amid the Past's great scenes, the Present's lot.  
And Nature needeth them e'en now as then ;  
In one idea, one age, seek not to pen  
Thy soul, but bid it wander back through time,  
And be in turn the child of every clime,  
From the emblazoned hall to the lost outcast's den.  
Still earth has shrines, but then we see them not,

Or marvel where the wondrous beauty lies  
That men have seen in many an earth-soiled spot ;  
It was the soft lights of the upper skies  
That rested o'er them then, and made them bright ;  
Beams that have paled in artificial light.

## LVIII.

"900 . . . In the same year King Alfred departed out of this world; that immovable pillar of the Western Saxons—that man full of justice, bold in arms, learned in speech, and, above all things, imbued with the divine instructions. For he had translated into his own language, out of Latin, unnumbered volumes, of so varied a nature, and so excellently, that the sorrowful book of Boethius seemed, not only to the learned but even to those who heard it read, as it were brought to life again. The monarch died on the seventh day after the solemnity of All Saints, and his body rests in peace in the city of Winchester."—*Ethelwerd's Chronicle*.

## LVIII.

## THE HERO-KING.

ONE hero fills a century, and the age  
An Alfred filled might well be satisfied ;  
He slept within his tomb the Saxon's pride,  
And History writ his name upon her page,  
And hailed him patriot, statesman, poet, sage,  
And Nature, in his children, bade him still  
Live for the land he loved, and guard from ill  
The shores round which the northern sea-steeds  
rage ;  
Son, daughter, grandson, echoes of his fame,  
Bore on to after years, until they died  
On coward hearts, and not that hero name  
Could rouse to manly hope or noble pride ;  
Priest-ridden, slavish, down they bow the head  
To the proud churchman, or the despot's tread.

## LIX.

It is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon laws that a servile thrael may become a thane, and a ceorl an eorl. The laws of Ethelstan provide that a thane may arrive at the dignity of an eorl, and that a massere or merchant, who went three times over sea with his own craft, might become a thane. Without the possession of a certain quantity of landed property, nobility of birth could not entitle to a seat in the Witena-gemot. The smith or armourer ranked among the lesser thanes.

## LIX.

## THE THANE'S FIRESIDE.

THE yule log crackles in the ample grate,  
And the rude hall looks cheerful in the light ;  
'T is well, for stern the clime and long the night ;  
Now welcome he who can the tale relate,  
How the old sea-king braved his adverse fate ;  
Or how the fearful sisters weave the thread  
Of human life amid the ghastly dead,  
While grisly demons on their bidding wait.  
Strange sounds had each one heard, strange sights  
had seen,  
For troubled spectres never cease their walk  
Till faith grows weak ; and years must intervene,  
Aye, years, and ages from that evening's talk  
To such an age as this, when earth and sky  
And soul, to some, seem scarce a mystery !

## LX.

WHEN Athelstan ascended the throne, his brother Edwin was accused of having plotted against his accession: Edwin, who was but a youth, denied the charge, yet Athelstan ordered him, with one attendant, to be put to sea in a boat, without oars. Carried by the winds out of sight of land, the unfortunate prince threw himself into the sea; his attendant afterwards reached the shore in safety. For seven years Athelstan mourned his brother's death, and performed a penance for his own crime.

## LX.

## THE REMORSE OF ATHELSTAN.—I.

AVAUNT! thou hideous spectre—hence—avaunt!

Leave me at last! have I not prayed and wept

In unknown agony, whilst men have slept?

Steal not around me now my heart to daunt,

And freeze mine eyes, or look as thou wert wont

When we were children,—ah! that would be  
worse—

'T would blast my spirit deeper than thy curse,

And that cold, shivering form that doth me haunt.

Is there no penance—long—strange—terrible,

That will bring peace unto my guilty heart,

As from rough shells we snatch the precious pearl?

Oh, God! if such there be, to me impart

The secret, and though life itself may fail

In the dread task, my spirit will not quail.



## LXI.

"ATHELSTAN educated and established Alan of Bretagne, Louis of France, and Haco of Norway; and these actions are not recorded by English writers, but are attested by the chronicles of the countries benefited by his liberality. Our own authors, by omitting these circumstances, have concealed part of his fame; but this moderation entitles them to credit in other similar events."—See *Sharon Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons."*

## LXI.

## ÆTHELSTAN,—II.

WITHIN the cloister feebler men had sought  
Peace for the guilty soul's great agony,  
But the strong battle on and do not flee :  
Perhaps, to his deep spirit came the thought,  
In some still, twilight hour of musing brought,  
That proof of sorrow for the past is given  
Best by our love to man, our faith in Heaven :  
And in the tangled web of life he wrought  
Bright colours round that one dark spot of crime,  
And peace, through him, came to his troubled land,  
And men forgot, as onward passed the time,  
That there was blood upon that powerful hand ;  
But did he, too, forget it ?—there are things  
The world forgets that yet leave deadliest stings.

## LXII.

THE story of Edwy and Elfgiva is too well known to need repetition. Edwy, or Edwin, was but sixteen years old when he succeeded his uncle Edred, in 955, in the government of a kingdom that the priests were filling with discontent and distraction by violently introducing the rule of St. Benedict.

The monkish chroniclers have painted Edwin's character in colours darkened by prejudice, but the more impartial Ethelwerd says that "he was much beloved, and that, on account of his great personal beauty, he was called Paukalus by the people."

## LXII.

EDWY AND ELFGIVA.

THE times have changed since of a Kentish king  
Augustine humbly begged a ruined pile,  
And saw the moss-grown church with thankful  
smile,

To thy dark day, poor Edwy, when the ring  
Given to thy bride was broken, as a thing  
Worthless and guilty, by a churchman's hand,  
And his proud words woke treason through thy  
land ;

And the vain curse had yet a poisoned sting  
That rankled in thy heart ; till one short year  
Of love, and grief, and anguish, quenched thy  
life.

Strange that mere words could cause such crushing  
fear,

Or priestly ban wake men to deeds of strife ;  
Nay, 't is not strange, for words all meaningless  
The feeble, shrinking soul yet curse or bless.

## LXIII.

THE Anglo-Saxon towns generally arose around the minster; the municipal affairs were managed by a *port-reeve* chosen by the associations called *gylds* which consisted of the freemen of the place. Under princes who carried the influence of the crown to its greatest extent, we find burghers treating as power to power with their king. A symbolic statue in the centre of the market was always a conspicuous object.

## LXIII.

## THE TOWN.

THE daws are wheeling round the minster roof,  
Where priest and bishop in grave council sit,  
While peasant groups, with joke and homely wit,  
Gather by the rude market-cross ; aloof  
Stands the port-reeve, or with a stern reproof  
Chides the ill-doer ; or with jealous eye  
Looks on the noble whose gay train sweeps by,  
The rough path echoing to his horse's hoof.  
Mountains and forests have been Freedom's shrine,  
But not her birth-place ; men have worshipped  
there,  
Lonely and sad, the holy and divine,  
That they would love as household things else-  
where ;  
'T is in the busy street, the crowded mart,  
That liberty hath sprung, and man must play his  
part.

## LXIV.

FROM the reign of Athelstan till that of Ethelred the Unready, or from the year 934 until 988, England appears to have been free from the invasions of the northern Vikings; but no wise or powerful princes had filled the throne, and all had been very young at their accession. The violence with which the rule of St. Benedict was forced upon the clergy, alienated the minds of the nobility from the princes who supported its introduction; there was external peace, but no national unity.

## LXIV.

## DISUNION.

THE Saxon sun had reached its noontide height,  
And there was peace; but 't was the stifled calm  
That bodes the tempest, but wakes no alarm;  
The throne looked fair in that deceitful light,  
Yet it was but a pageant, for the might  
Of power was gone, and by religion's shrine  
Stood but a shadow of that thing divine,  
Chilling the heart, though glittering to the sight.  
While smiled that treacherous sky the priest went  
forth  
And sowed disunion through the sleeping land;  
It had awoke if from the stormy north  
The raven's\* scream had sounded—but the hand  
That gave the convent dole—the voice, too, heard  
In sainted hymn, no heart-forebodings stirred.

\* The emblem of the Northmen, whose banner was a raven.



## LXV.

DUNSTAN was born in A.D. 925—the same year that Athelstan ascended the throne. His parents, who were called Heorstan and Cynethryth, seem to have lived near Glastonbury, and were of noble birth. When a child, he often visited the ruins of an ancient British church near his home; tradition had ascribed its foundation to Joseph of Arimathea, the supposed apostle of Britain. The beautiful abbey of Glastonbury was greatly enriched by Edgar when Dunstan had become its abbot, and it had been conformed to the rule of the Benedictines.

## LXV.

## DUNSTAN.—I. THE BOY.

WITHIN an ancient church's ruined aisles

A boy was idling 'mid the ferns and flowers

That clothed the crumbling walls; behind, the  
towers

Of a proud abbey rose; sometimes with smiles

He watched the daws wheel round the antique piles,

A bird, a beetle, or a butterfly,

Might for a time arrest his wandering eye,

But deeper thoughts yet filled his soul meanwhile:

No common soul was his; for good or ill

There was a mighty power; yet who that saw  
The truant dreaming there, so calm and still,

Could omens from it of his future draw?

That child's heart, like the veiled Egyptian shrine,

The monstrous might conceal, or the divine.

## LXVI.

It was during one of Dunstan's visits to the old British church that he had, according to the monkish recorders of his life, a vision of his future greatness. Some Irish ecclesiastics had settled at Glastonbury, and were teaching the liberal studies to the children of the nobility; from them Dunstan received his first instruction: during his studies in the monastery he had a severe illness, and during the night, in a fit of delirium, he climbed upon the roof of the church, and, descending through a hole left by some workmen, was found the next morning asleep in the edifice. This adventure was converted into a miracle.

## LXVI.

## DUNSTAN.—II. THE DREAM.

HE had been thinking how, in earth's first day,  
Men had built cities and been great; he slept,  
And his mind still its waking musings kept,  
But mixed with visions of what round him lay—  
The abbey's towers—the ruins, mossed and grey;  
He saw a lordly monastery rise,  
With towers and chapel there before his eyes,  
And down each aisle deep music found its way;  
He saw the abbot in his costly chair,  
Attended like a prince; and then there came  
Voices, he knew not whence—as if the air  
Grew vocal with one word—it was his name:  
He woke—the dream of sleep had passed away,  
But it came back in waking dreams by day.

## LXVII.

THE parents of Dunstan encouraged him in study, and his great abilities soon enabled him to master all the learning and science of the times; he excelled in music and in the mechanical arts, and also in painting, and copying manuscripts.

His uncle Aldhelm, Archbishop of Canterbury, introduced him at the court of Athelstan, and that King often pleased himself with the young courtier's musical talents.

## LXVII.

DUNSTAN.—III. THE YOUTH'S ASPIRINGS.

HE would be great, and hard he toiled for fame :  
His one desire was to outstrip his race,  
Or with the first to keep an even pace.  
Manful the toil, and noble was the aim—  
But God and man a something higher claim  
From man than this ; a name may be a power  
To aid the right cause in the adverse hour ;  
If that the motive, none the wish may blame :  
Dunstan ! perchance that holy wish was thine ;  
Amid the pure aspirings of the youth  
How much of faith and love with all entwine—  
Love that may lead, and faith that points to truth :  
Ah ! had he followed then where nature led,  
Her light had gladness o'er his pathway shed.

## LXVIII.

"No circumstance can more impressively attest the superiority of Dunstan's attainments than his having been accused, while at court, of demoniacal arts. The charge of magic was of all others the most destructive, because the most difficult to repel. Every exertion of superior intellect in defence was misconstrued to be preternatural, and confirmed the imputation. His enemies were successful—Dunstan was driven from court, and, not content with his disgrace, they insulted him, pursued, and threw him into a marsh; he extricated himself, and retired to a friend's house."—*Sharon Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons."*

## LXVIII.

## DUNSTAN.—IV. THE TRIAL.

BELIEVE not him whose creed thy heart denies  
In all its better moments ; when the tone  
Of others' gladness wakes one in thine own,  
Or when beneath the blue o'er-arching skies  
Earth in the blessedness of sunshine lies,  
What thou think'st then, of God, the universe,  
Of men and of thyself, oh, think no worse  
When man with sophistries thy spirit tries.  
His hour of trial came, as come it must,  
To every heart, though wearing different forms ;  
All faded upon which he placed his trust,  
Like mirage pictures in the desert storms,  
From where he entered blithesome, frank, and gay,  
Gloomy, suspicious, sad, he takes his lonely way.



## LXIX.

AFTER Dunstan's retirement from the court of Athelstan, he became attached to a young maiden whom he wished to marry ; a relation whom he had in the church, opposed his wishes, and pronounced them suggestions of the devil to lead him from a monastic life. Dunstan at first strongly objected ; but his relative still continued his importunities, denouncing the vengeance of Heaven upon him if he persisted in his refusal.

## LXIX.

DUNSTAN.—V. LOVE.

ALL is not lost, for Nature still survives  
Within the heart, and she can build afresh  
What courts have spoiled, e'en as her broken  
mesh

The gossamer re-weaves, once in our lives  
Love comes, and all the beautiful revives ;  
And noble thoughts we never dreamed to feel,  
It wakens in us, as sunbeams reveal  
The sparry cave ; 't is love the spirit shrives.  
He loved as passionate natures only can,  
And then the tempter came, not as they tell,  
Who, knowing little of the life of man,  
Think we can sin by loving him too well ;  
No, from his creed, not from his heart, it came,  
To blast and scorch him with unhallowed flame.

## LXX.

AMIDST the agitation of contending passions, the health of Dunstan gave way; he was attacked by a dangerous disease, and his life was despaired of; at length he slowly recovered, assumed the monkish habit, and renounced the world. During the reigns of Edred, Edwy, and Edgar, his power was unbounded. His illness, subsequent austerities, and great ambition, remind us of Ignatius Loyola.

## LXX.

DUNSTAN.—VI. THE FALL.

Love God the more by loving man the less ;  
By outraging the nature He has given,  
Win thou a brighter pathway to his Heaven ;  
Call his fair world a howling wilderness,  
And man, whom Jesus came on earth to bless,  
Heir of perdition ; leave thy soul to those  
To whom thou can'st not, if thou dar'st, disclose  
Its doubts, for strives it not in mute distress ?  
This was the trial that assailed his heart,  
And crushed the truthful from it ; from that hour,  
Deceiver and deceived, he played his part,  
On love and Nature's ruins rose to power ;  
His life, henceforth, a falsehood, till the light  
That once had guided, did but dim his sight.

## LXXI.

“HE made with his own hands a subterraneous cave or cell, so unlike anything of the sort, that his biographer, who had seen it, knew not what to call it. . . . Dunstan carried to his cell a fragment of his former disposition ; he exercised himself in working in metals.”—*Sharon Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons."*

His miracles may be passed over in silence, as the effects of a credulous age, and, perhaps, of a deranged mind.

## LXXI.

## DUNSTAN.—VII. NATURE'S REVENGE.

BUT the death-struggles of that fiery soul,  
The grave-like cell the haggard brow revealed,  
For Nature without conflict did not yield :  
Not to uproot all passion, but control,  
And make the spirit one harmonious whole,  
Religion aims ; the harp she tunes again,  
By earthly damps unstrung, a loftier strain  
It then can give than e'er from Eden stole.  
He who foresees the destinies of men,  
Gives them the passions suited to their task,  
Not one too many, or too few ; who, then,  
Shall proudly murmuring dare of Him to ask,  
Why was I thus ? seek, rather, through the strife  
Of conflict, to work out thy end of life.

## LXXII.

"I BELIEVE Dunstan's monkish and very vulgar-minded panegyrists to have done his character and memory great wrong; and that they have measured the distinguished statesman by the narrow gauge of their own intelligence and desire. Whatever may have been the Archbishop's private leaning, he appears to have conducted himself with great discretion."—*Kemble's "Saxons in England."*

It is said he refused to crown Ethelred, judging, no doubt, that it was impolitic to raise a mere child to the throne, and under such equivocal circumstances as those which attended his accession.

## LXXII.

DUNSTAN.—VIII. REFUSING TO CROWN ETHELRED.

BOWED down with years, but unsubdued in will,  
 Stood the stern monk beside the boyish king,  
 While nearer pressed around the gazing ring  
 Of priests and thanes, who the old chapel fill :  
 The chant had ceased, and all was still ; so still,  
     That the breeze, sighing through the cloisters,  
             came  
 Weird-like ; and through each mailed warrior's  
     frame  
 Shot with an undefined but fearful thrill.  
 " I crown thee not, I bless thee not ;"—the word  
     Fell as a prophet's on the listening throng,  
 And sad forebodings in their hearts it stirred,  
     Dark fears that would be darker truths ere long :  
 And ere the spell was gone that on them lay,  
 From the hushed chapel Dunstan passed away.



## LXXIII.

“SIRIC the successor of Dunstan, reasoned that as they (the Danes) only came for booty, it would be wiser to give them what they wanted. . . . Whether the King’s ecclesiastical advisers were afraid of calling out the chiefs of the country, with their military arrays; or, like most clerical statesmen, were incompetent to advise the wisest public measure; or whether the nobles, in their contempt for the King and his administration, were not displeased at the invasion, and therefore did not oppose the payment, cannot now be certainly known.”—*Sharon Turner’s “History of the Anglo-Saxons.”*

## LXXIII.

## ETHELRED THE UNREADY.

DARK clouds are glooming o'er the Saxon land,  
Its King a churchman's tool, and gold alone  
Buys from the Danish chief the tottering throne.  
Woe to the land whose priests are kings; no hand  
Can bear a heavier scourge than their slight wand;  
Minster and convent rise amid the woods,  
And vesper chimes float o'er the solitudes,  
But mix with shouts from many a pirate band.  
It was a time for deeds, not words though pure,  
The fortress, not the chapel; and the arm  
Swinging the censor with a childish care,  
Had helped to save a nation; there is balm  
Sweeter than incense in the grateful tear  
Of the weak saved from agony and fear.

## LXXIV.

“A.D. 1002, and in that year the King ordered all the Danish men that were in England to be slain; this was done on St. Brice’s Mass-day.”

“A.D. 1005. In this year was the great famine throughout the English nation; such, that no man ever before recollected one so grim.”—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

## LXXIV.

## MASSACRE OF THE DANES.

THINK not thy crooked policy will save  
Thy crown or kingdom, weak and cruel chief,  
It will but give to thee a deadly grief;  
Crimes do not go unpunished to the grave,  
The avenging furies back the culprit wave  
From its repose, and hunt him o'er the earth,  
Shouting in silent hours, whispering in mirth,  
Words that will make a coward of the brave.  
The blighted harvest withers in the field,  
The house-dog watches by a fireless home,  
In Wolfnoth's hall are neither sword nor shield;  
And herds untended through the forest roam,  
And in men's hearts died love, and hope, and trust,  
Things that will raise a nation from the dust.

## LXXV.

"ETHELRED was liberal to poets who amused him. Gunnlaugr, the Scalld, sailed to London, and presented himself to the King, with an heroic poem on the royal *virtues*. He sang it, and received in return a purple tunic, lined with the richest furs, and adorned with fringe; and was appointed to a station in the palace."—*Sharon Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons."*

## LXXV.

## THE POET.

RUST gather on that harp from aye that rings  
The false praise of the worthless ; or is still  
When the oppressor vaunts his deeds of ill ;  
'T is sad as if an angel's starry wings  
Bore him to Erebus. What ! can the things  
Of earthly tinsel dazzle eyes that see  
Beneath the surface of humanity,  
How the dark deed, from a mean heart upsprings ?  
Shall there be none to live the spirit-life,  
No priest of nature, and no seer of time ?  
Still, let some whisper 'mid this deafening strife,  
That earth yet keeps her grasp of the sublime,  
That Time still touches on Eternity,  
That faith, and life, and death, are things that ever  
be.

## LXXVI.

EDMUND IRONSIDE, the brave son of the weak Ethelred, succeeded to the government of the distracted kingdom, half of which was now in the possession of the Danes, in A.D. 1016. Before the battle of Scearstan, addressing the English, he conjured them to remember their country, their families, their homes, for which they were fighting.

During the conflict, a report was spread by the enemy, that he was killed; but ascending an eminence, he took off his helmet, and exposed his unarmed head to undeceive his people: but the panic had spread; his efforts were unavailing; the battle was lost.

## LXXVI.

EDMUND IRONSIDE.

HE thought his hero-soul could animate  
For a brief space that flying host—'t is vain ;  
Wildly they rush across the fatal plain—  
All that they highest, dearest, held of late,  
In one mad wish for life they leave to fate ;  
Their country seemed but as another—fame  
A thing unthought of—freedom but a name ;  
Within their craven hearts died even love and hate.  
Clasp the plumed helm again upon thy brow,  
And turn thee from that field where all is lost ;  
And yet it is not so ; not then, nor now, .  
Does that which so much heart and mind hath  
cost  
Perish for ever from one blow.—He passed  
From the night-shadowed plain, the proudest and  
the last.



## LXXVII.

"CANUTE, from his warlike ability, surnamed the Brave; from his renown and empire, the Great; from his liberality, the Rich; and from his devotion, the Pious."—*Sharon Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons."*

"1017. In this year King Canute obtained the whole realm of the English race. And he banished Edwy the Etheling, and afterwards commanded him to be slain, and Edwy, King of the Churls."

"1029. This year King Canute gave to Christ-Church, at Canterbury, the haven at Sandwich, and all the dues that arise thereof on either side of the haven."—*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.*

## LXXVII.

## CANUTE THE GREAT.

CANUTE the Great!—the great in what? in crime?

I know no title that he hath to be

Ennobled thus by flattering history;

A massive figure through the mists of Time

He looms upon us, but the true sublime

Is not in him: 't is easy to forgive

Those whom we envy not; permit to live

Those whom we fear not to our height can climb:

Easy to put aside the glittering toy

That symbolized the power his stern red hand

Clutched with a grasp death only could destroy;

And to heap offerings of a plundered land

Upon the church's altars, ne'er can be

Accepted sacrifice to Deity.

## LXXVIII.

DURING the troubles that followed the withdrawal of the Romans from Britain, a great portion of the land had gone out of cultivation and was again covered with forest.

“Half a century in an unexhausted soil is ample time to convert the most flourishing district into thick brushwood and impervious *bush*. Beech and fir do not require fifty years to become large trees ; the elm, the alder, and even the oak, are well-sized growths at that age.”—*Kemble's “Saxons in England.”*

## LXXVIII.

## THE FOREST.

PAUSE for a while upon those gentler things  
History deems worthless 'mid her deeds of strife  
(Though blood and tears ne'er made a nation's  
life).

O'er the still lake its way the heron wings,  
Close to the swineherd's cot the redbreast sings,  
While he by gurgling brook or forest tree  
Stretches his limbs in idle liberty,  
While through the glades the hunter's bugle rings.  
The forest! 't was our Saxon fathers' home,  
Girdling with leafy walls each cultured spot;  
No wonder that we love the gothic dome,  
Impressions of that past we have forgot  
Rest on us still, though, mindless of their power,  
We think ourselves the offspring of the hour.

## LXXIX.

"THAT Godwin was the son of a herdsman is a fact recorded in the MS. Chronicle of Radulphus Niger. This author says explicitly what no other has mentioned—Earl Godwin was the son of a herdsman."—*Sharon Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons."*

Godwin was handsome and eloquent: he married Gyda, the sister of Ulfr, the Danish Jarl, whose life he saved, and they were the parents of Harold, the last Saxon king.

## LXXIX.

GODWIN.—I. CHILDHOOD.

A BOY through that old forest wends his way,  
Driving his cattle to the upland side,  
Where through the livelong day he will abide,  
Nor chide the sun for its too long delay ;  
Though brother he hath none, nor social play ;  
But woods, and streamlets, and the grassy hills,  
O'er which the fresh breeze wanders as it wills,  
And clouds are chased by every sunny ray,  
Have been to him as friends from infant years ;  
And with his thoughts and them he lives alone,  
Nursing in solitude his hopes and fears,  
King of a little world, and that his own :  
The night shades gather, and then son to sire  
Sings the wild saga by the cottage fire.

## LXXX.

AFTER the battle of Scesarstan, a Danish chief, having lost his way in a wood, met a youth driving his cattle to pasture, and asked to be directed to the camp of Canute, offering the boy his ring if he would show him the way.—“I will not accept your ring, but I will try to lead you to your friends,” was Godwin’s answer—and taking Ulfr to his father’s cottage, he gave him refreshment.

## LXXX.

GODWIN.—II. THE MEETING WITH ULFR.

THE forest echoes to another tread  
Than the lone herd-boy's, and with headlong  
    speed,  
Through bush and fern brake, as in utmost need,  
A warrior presses, turning oft his head,  
Listening, but pausing not; the sun-beams shed  
    Their golden arrows on his mossy path,  
But the wild tempest in its fiercest wrath  
Had waked within his heart far less of dread.  
He is perceived;—there stands the peasant youth,  
    But the frank bearing of his noble face  
Forbids distrust; so truth gives birth to truth,  
    Ulfr to Godwin tells his name and race,  
“Give me protection, lead me to my king,  
And thy reward shall be this priceless ring.”



## LXXXI.

As soon as it was dark, the horses were provided, and the fugitive and his guide proceeded to the Danish camp, which they reached in safety the next day. The grateful jarl treated Godwin as his own child, and, after some time, Canute, to gratify Ulfr, raised the young herdsman to the rank of jarl.

## LXXXI.

GODWIN.—III. THE FLIGHT.

"I NEED not that—take back thy glittering bribe,  
I sell not favours to a man in need,  
Nor is gold payment for a worthy deed,"  
Replied the youth, and put the gem aside;  
"Yet in my father's cottage thou canst 'bide  
Till the night shadows darken o'er the sky,  
Day is no time for fugitives to fly,  
And if need be, I will be Ulfr's guide."  
Oh, 'mid the gloom and darkness of the past,  
This story gathers light around it,—one  
Perchance of many like it, that would cast  
Hope on the future, light on ages gone,  
Making us turn with loving eyes, and trust,  
To Him, who hath to all mankind been just.

## LXXXII.

THE favour showed by Edward the Confessor to the Norman nobles, amongst whom he had passed his youth, was particularly distasteful to Godwin; it was owing to his having armed to punish Eustace, Count of Bologne, and his followers, for having killed some of the citizens of Dover, which was in Godwin's earldom, that he and his family were banished, the King having taken the part of his Norman favourites.

## LXXXII.

GODWIN.—IV. THE EARL.

THAT care-worn man, amid his stately sons,  
Who guides the sceptre for the feeble hand  
That holds it; hero of his Saxon land,  
Whose frowning look the Norman courtier shuns,  
Whose eloquence the hostile Witna stuns,  
Is the Earl Godwin; time hath changed that  
face,

But the soul's current there hath left a trace  
More marked, though silent and unknown it runs;  
The thoughts of lofty and far-seeing souls  
To others' ears they seldom can reveal,  
Or the strong will the social love controls;  
Thus, smaller minds guess little what they feel,  
Till in the outer life the thought appears,  
Deed of a day, but product of long years.

## LXXXIII.

"A.D. 1053. In this year was the King at Winchester, at Easter, and Godwin, the earl with him, and Harold, the earl, his son, and Tosty. Then on the second day of Easter, sat he with the King at the feast; then suddenly sank he down by the footstool, deprived of speech, and of all his power, and he was carried into the king's chamber, and they thought it would pass over, but it did not so; but he continued on, thus speechless and powerless, until the Thursday, and then resigned his life, and he lies there within the Old-Minster."—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

Some say Godwin was denying his share in the murder of Alfred, the King's brother, when he was seized with his fatal illness.

## LXXXIII.

GODWIN.—V. THE DEATH-FEAST.

WHEN on the fields of fight he braved his foes,  
He knew death tracked him ; and across his bark  
Its shadow crept, when through the billows dark  
Of a wild sea he fled ; and 'mid repose,  
When the night-glooms around all nature close,  
And immaterial things assert their sway,  
To his unlistening ear its voice found way,  
Hollow as from earth's sepulchres it rose.  
But no shades darken o'er that festive hall,  
No voice sounds ominous amid the throng,  
And proudly through that crowd, erect and tall,  
To meet his King Earl Godwin moves along ;  
But there, unseen, beside him glides that form,  
Whose shadow he had felt in fight and storm.

## LXXXIV.

WHEN Godwin and his family were restored to their country and honours, after defeating the machinations of the Norman favourites of the King, Sweyn, his eldest son, was not allowed to share in the privileges granted to the rest of his relations ; he was outlawed for a murder committed six years before. Stung with remorse for his crime, he set off to walk with naked feet, from Flanders, where he then was, to Jerusalem ; he died on his way back, at Constantinople.— *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

## LXXXIV.

## SWEYN, THE OUTLAWED.

WITHIN the garden where the Saviour prayed,  
Sits a lone man ; upon his shaded face  
Are sadder lines than time alone can trace ;  
From the fierce setting sun an olive's shade  
Screened his o'er-wearied frame, the cool breeze  
played  
Through the old branches on his heated brow,  
But nought of what is round him recks he now ;  
Before the past, the now, the future, fade.  
Barefooted he hath reached that sainted earth  
That was to give him peace,—the goal is won ;  
But memories of the spot that gave him birth,  
Thoughts, dreams, regrets, he would for ever shun,  
Press on him in that moment, when he deemed  
The present had the darkened past redeemed.



## LXXXV.

"A.D. 1052. Then soon came William, the Earl, from beyond sea, with a great band of Frenchmen; and the King received him, and as many of his companions as it pleased him."—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

This visit of William of Normandy took place during the exile of Godwin and his family; the short-sighted King showed him his cities and castles, and loaded him with presents.

## LXXXV.

## THE VISIT.

HE came an honoured and a peaceful guest,  
No omens marked his way, no bloody sun  
Glared on the earth, no stars did backward run,  
But bright in gold and crimson glowed the west,  
And men awoke, and toiled, and went to rest  
The same as ever, and gay pomp and glee,  
Unwonted, broke the dumb monotony  
That o'er the monkish King and convent-palace  
    prest;  
With courtly words he soothes the monarch's ear,  
With sacred trifles wins his feeble heart;  
Of guest and kinsman who can feel a fear,  
Or lack frank bearing, or free speech?—they  
    part;  
The one beside his crucifix forgets  
All that hath past; his sword the other whets.

## LXXXVI.

EDITHA, "the rose of England," the daughter of Godwin, and wife of Edward the Confessor, is described by Ingulf, who knew her, as very beautiful, meek, and modest, faithful, virtuous, and the enemy of no one; she was also a learned woman. During the exile of her family and friends, she was confined by Edward in the Convent of Wherwell, but was restored to her regal honours upon their return.

## LXXXVI.

EDITHA IN THE MONASTERY AT WHERWELL.

THE morning sun crept through the quiet room,  
And fell upon the web her fingers wrought  
With womanish skill; a task that left each  
thought

Unfettered, and yet stole away its gloom ;

"I scarcely could regret my altered doom,"

She said, "but that injustice hath its smart,

And fears for those I love oppress my heart ;

O'er Godwin's house the shades of evening loom,

Else were the joyless palace for the cell

An outward change alone ; and I more free  
Within this convent shade, than when I dwell

In regal halls, unloving King, with thee ;  
Here of my heart, and mind, and time, am I  
Still Queen, and Edith loves her destiny."

## LXXXVII.

EDWARD, the son of Edmund Ironside, had been brought up in Hungary, Canute having attempted his life; he had married Agatha, the daughter of Henry, the German Emperor; Edward the Confessor sent for him, to make him his successor, but he died, the year following his arrival, much to the grief of the nation.

“A.D. 1057. Alas! that was a rueful case,  
and harmful  
for all this nation,  
that he so soon  
his life did end,  
after that he to Angle-land came,  
for the mishap  
of this wretched nation.”

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.*

## LXXXVII.

DEATH SHADOWINGS.—I. EDWARD THE ETHELING.

EXILE, thou tread'st thy native shores again !

But the death-shadows on thy regal brow

Are resting, dark and ominous, e'en now ;

But with thy life, far more than it, will wane—

Thy ebbing pulse shall through a nation's vein

Send back the life-blood ; in thy grave will lie

The shades of what had been a dynasty ;

A people to its heart will feel thy pain.

'T was even so ; and yet they knew him not ;

But he was symbol of a higher thing,

And in the weakness of our mortal lot,

And 'mid the darkness earthly shadows fling ;

Better the emblem see, than but a place

That our own image fills—or formless space.

## LXXXVIII.

"IN 1057 England lost Leofric, by whose wisdom the reign of Edward was preserved from many perils and disorders. . . . Leofric was the father of Hereward, whose life seemed devoted to the task of supplying incidents to the genius of romance and heroic song."—*Sharon Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons."*

"A.D. 1057. In the same year (in which Edward Etheling died) died Leofric, the Earl; he was very wise for God and also for the world, which was a blessing to all this nation. He lies at Coventry."—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.*

## LXXXVIII.

## DEATH-SHADOWINGS.—II. LEOFRIC.

A WISH, an unsubstantial hope—a beam,  
 Perchance, but like a spring-day morning's, fled,  
 When o'er the Etheling's brow the death-glooms  
 spread ;

'T was but the fading of a glittering dream,  
 The passing of fair things that did but seem,  
 And yet were not,—but now the shadows creep  
 O'er a great life, a truth that Time will keep,  
 A fact, with whose results the ages teem.

He died ; men did not marvel, for the thing

Was common as the setting of the sun :

But when the midnight's spectral voices ring,

And the cold mists roll heavily and dun

Across their path, 't is common things they feel

That make of every day the woe or weal.



## LXXXIX.

LEOFRIC appears to have had less ambition than Godwin, and to have been more concerned for the good of the nation than his own advancement: it was his moderation, and that of some others, that prevented a civil war in 1052.

“ . . . . Then thought some of them that it would be a great folly that they should join battle; because there was nearly all that was most noble in England in the two armies, and they thought that they should expose the land to our foes, and cause great destruction among ourselves. Then counselled they that hostages should be given mutually; and they appointed a term at London.”  
—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

## LXXXIX.

DEATH-SHADOWINGS.—III. LEOFRIC.

Wise, moderate, reverent!—when he died, a tie  
That bound discordant souls together broke;  
The haughty listened when the noble spoke,  
And the weak looked to him confidently  
Who counselled peace; and when he bent his knee  
Before the shrine of God, the poor one saw  
A fellow-mortal only, and the flaw  
Of riches and of power he did not see.  
Clear-shining, but not dazzling, on he moved,  
To set in peace; but his far-seeing eye  
Discerned the storm-clouds o'er the land he loved,  
Yet saw beyond them, too, a brighter sky;  
And hope and courage for the future grew  
Out of the present's gloom: the true soul sees the  
true.

## XC.

EDWARD was the son of Ethelred and Emma, the sister of Robert, Duke of Normandy, the father of William the Conqueror: in A.D. 1013, Ethelred, being severely pressed by the Danes, sent first his queen and afterwards his two youngest sons, Edward and Alfred, to Normandy, where they were kindly received by their relative Robert, and where Edward remained until A.D. 1040, when he returned to England in the reign of his half-brother, Hardicanute, who appears to have treated him kindly: he was chosen King by the English on the death of Hardicanute in the following year.

## XC.

## EDWARD THE CONFESSOR.—1.

IN monkish cowl, or in the hermit's cell,  
In pious trifling might his days have fled ;  
But among living men, with spirit dead,  
He dwelt and moved a mockery ; and there fell  
A blight around him, making home a hell ;  
In all life's solemn duties he could see  
Nought but the traces of mortality,  
In earthly beauty but a demon's spell.  
The mystic splendour of the silent skies,  
The wondrous beauty wheresoe'er we tread,  
Earth's kind humanities and household ties,  
Must they but fill the soul with secret dread,  
As if the purest breath of love were sin,  
And poison lurked each flower of life within !

## XCI.

WEAK in intellect, alienating the minds of the English by his attachment to Norman favourites, expending money on relics and churches that should have been spent in fortifying his kingdom, Edward paved the way for the subversion of the Saxon dynasty: he is described as tall and well made, with a fair complexion; his time was chiefly passed between prayers and hunting: he was canonized, and many miracles attributed to him.

## XCI.

## EDWARD THE CONFESSOR.—II.

No neutral character will nature own ;  
For good or evil we must live and die,  
And vain it is the destiny to fly ;  
Unknown, unfelt, no life hath ever flown,  
Though it may seem a drop to oceans thrown ;  
Power unemployed, as power misused, may tell  
On the world's progress ; in the monkish cell  
Have mouldered men that should have graced a  
throne.  
And the last Edward of the Saxon name  
Died, and was buried in that stately pile  
His piety had reared,—the way to fame,  
And heaven as well, men thought : nor need we  
smile ;  
The feeling lingers with us still,—men give  
Their gold for that for which they ought to live.

## XCII.

“A.D. 1060. In this year there was a great earthquake. . . . A.D. 1066. Then was over all England such a token seen in the heavens as no man ever before saw. Some men said that it was cometa, the star, which some men call the haired star; and it appeared first on the eve Litania Major, the 8th before the Kalends of May, and so shone all the seven nights.”—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

This comet is represented in the Bayeux tapestry; it appeared in the year in which the battle of Hastings was fought.

## XCII.

## THE EVENTIDE.—I.

THE night was closing round the Saxon's throne,  
The signs of change were all around, yet few  
From the right omens faithful augury drew ;  
There was no omen in the hollow moan  
Of blighting winds in summer, or the tone  
Of earthquake or of tempest, yet with fear  
These shook the unthinking, as they reached his  
ear  
With fearful tidings of a land o'erthrown.  
Not Sybil-like doth Nature stand to warn  
Kings and their people of their destiny ;  
She wraps her head in clouds by mountain tarn,  
But there she speaketh but of Deity,  
And the immortal, not of earthly things—  
The fate of empires, or the doom of kings.



## XCIII.

"A.D. 1054. This year went Seward the Earl both with a ship-force and a land-force, and put to flight King Macbeth ; . . . but his son Osborn and his sister's son Seward, and some of his house carls and also of the King's were slain.

"And in this year there was so great a murrain among cattle as no man remembered for many years before."—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

## XCIII.

## THE EVENTIDE.—II.

PALE famine, with her nerveless hand, had stood  
By many a forest home, and plague had spread  
Her dark wings o'er the marts where merchants  
tread,  
And war had quenched the noble's hearth in blood,  
And the best ships were sunk in ocean's flood,  
And strangers stood around the monarch's throne,  
Who loved their country better than his own,  
That King too pious to be just or good.  
These were the omens that men should have read ;  
And some there were who spelt the signs aright,  
And saw the crown upon the Norman's head,  
And the dark battle-field of Hastings' fight ;  
A people's common deeds and words are signs,  
The future's prophet asks no plainer lines.

## XCIV.

THAT it was the wish of Edward the Confessor that Harold should succeed him is expressly stated in the *Saxon Chronicle*; his character was full of promise; he had on many occasions showed great talents, moderation, and undaunted bravery; he was beloved by the people, and had made himself feared by the turbulent nobility: if Harold had not fallen, the fight of Hastings would have been but a barren victory to William, but his death left the English without a leader suited to the emergencies of the times.

## XCIV.

HAROLD.—I.

AND now there rises from the shadowy past  
A kingly figure, on whose mournful brow  
The Norns have written doom,—and who art  
thou ?  
“Of a wrecked bark the tall but shattered mast  
Of England’s Saxon kings and heroes, last,  
The embodiment of systems passed away,  
The type of principles, some far-off day,  
The Anglo-Saxon will to death hold fast.”  
A herdsman’s grandson, but a people’s choice ;  
Harold, thou hadst a right divine to reign,  
A right divine to die : there is a voice  
That never speaks from patriot-graves in vain ;  
Thy single arm thy country could not save,  
And the throne was less noble than the grave.

## XCV.

“ . . . . and William came against him (Harold) unawares, before his people were set in order. But the King, nevertheless, strenuously fought against him with those men who would follow him ; and there was great slaughter made on either hand. There was slain King Harold, and Leofwin, the Earl, his brother, and Girth, the Earl, his brother ; and the Frenchman had possession of the place of carnage, all as God granted them for the people's sins.”—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

## XCV.

## HAROLD.—II.

AMID the bloody haze of Hastings' fight  
The Saxon sun went down when Harold died,  
And his brave brothers perished at his side ;  
He who from chaos order draws, and light  
To spring from darkness, maketh right of might  
In a world's history ; but no finite power,  
Whose sight and sway are bounded by the hour,  
To claim such high prerogative hath right :  
Years of oppression passed, and race with race  
Waged fierce, unceasing war ; peace came at last,  
When time had softened down each hostile trace,—  
But was there progress till the warfare passed ?  
That Normandy to England joined, became  
Her curse, almost her ruin, not her fame.

## XCVI.

It is said that Gyda, or Githa, the mother of Harold, offered to William the Conqueror the weight of her son's dead body in gold if he would give it her to bury, but that he refused.

"A.D. 1067. This year Harold's mother, Githa, and the wives of many good men with her, went to the Steep Holmes, and there abode some time; and afterwards went from thence over sea to St. Omer's."  
—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

## XCVI.

## THE MOTHER OF HAROLD.

AROUND that grief-struck woman silently  
They stood, yet gave her not of words or tears,  
For each one had her load of woes and fears,  
Beneath whose weight she bent; it was the tie  
Of sorrow, scarcely that of sympathy,  
That bound the orphan and the widowed bride  
In that dark hour to childless Githa's side;  
She raised at length her sunk and stony eye  
And gazed her last on England—and "Farewell"  
Came deep and hollow from her moveless lip,  
"I cannot bless the land where Harold fell,  
And where the cup of woe to its last sip  
The mother drained—nor will she curse where rest  
Her children's graves, and where she once was  
blest."



## XCVII.

HAROLD fell by the great standard that he had defended to the last, as the shades of an autumnal night were closing over the field of Hastings: the force of the Anglo-Saxons was very inferior to that of the Normans—one author says not more than a fourth; they had engaged and defeated Harold Hardrada and the Norwegians a few days before: so fearful were the monks of Waltham Abbey that the battle would be fatal to Harold, that they sent two of their number, Osegod Cnoppe and Ailric the Childemaister, to the field, to secure his body if he fell.

## XCVII.

## NIGHT AFTER BATTLE.

SILENCE and death ! how hideous or how fair  
These two may be ; soft as in angel's sleep  
The dead may look, and grief forget to weep ;  
And on the mountains there are moments, rare  
And precious, when the earth, and sky, and air,  
Are hushed in breathless stillness, as if God  
Amid their mighty solitudes had trod.  
And not a tone did awe-struck nature dare ;  
And death, and night, and silence settled down  
Upon that field of fatal fight ; and not  
A requiem sighed the wind ; with sullen frown  
The clouds hung moveless o'er the accursed spot,  
But bursting storms, less fearful, had seemed there  
The death was doom, the silence was despair.

## XCVIII.

IN England the conquering race have been fused into the conquered: the name of Conqueror can, however, scarcely be applied with propriety to William, who "waited" until the people, left without a leader fit to govern so distracted a kingdom, offered him the crown, on condition that he swore to govern them according to their ancient laws; and it was not until that promise, unfaithfully kept by himself, was gradually observed by his successors, that peace was restored to the land.

## XCVIII.

## THE ANGLO-SAXONS.

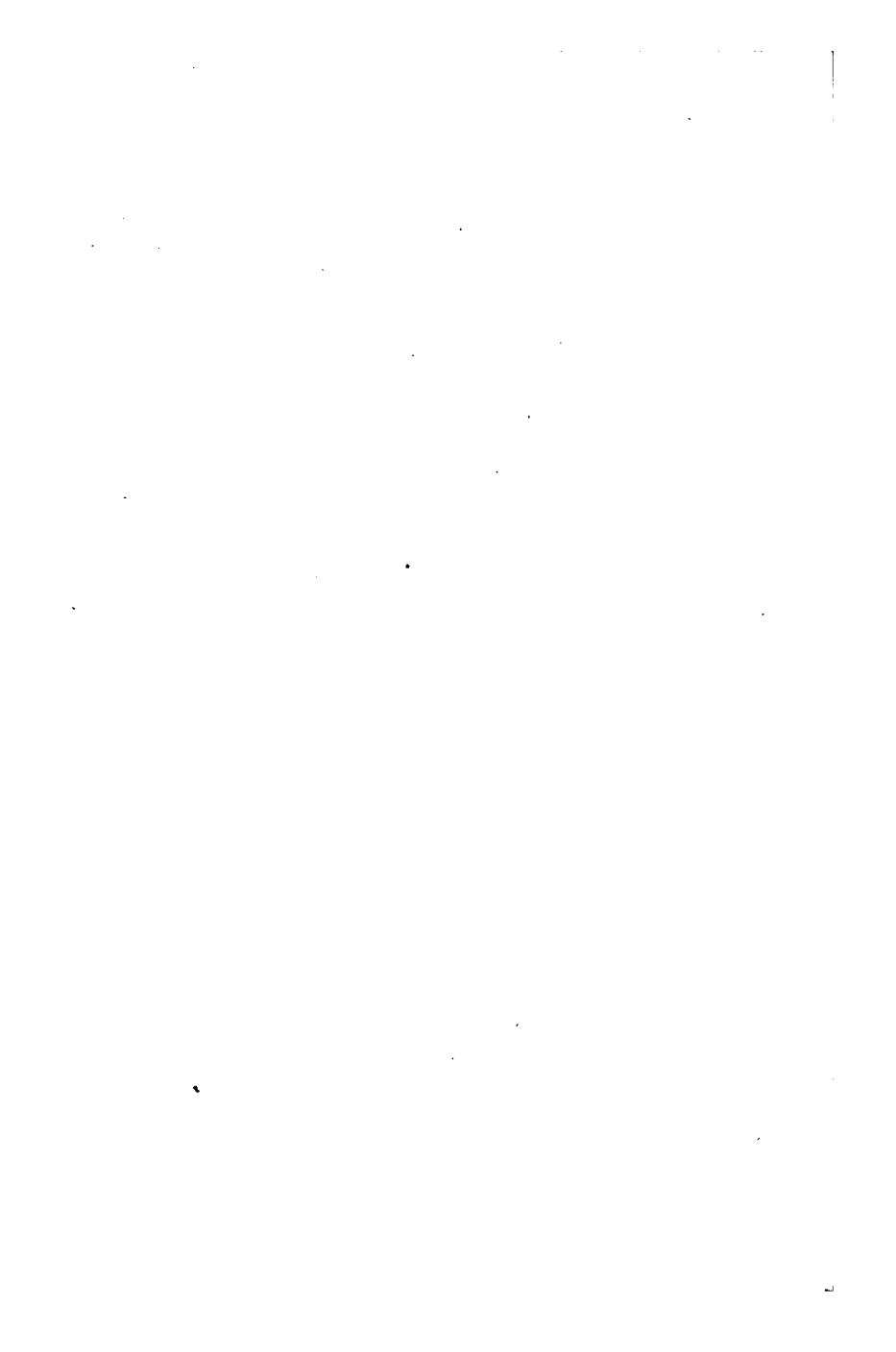
CONQUERED, but unsubdued in spirit still,  
The sullen Saxon tilled the Norman's field,  
Chained down to earth he still refused to yield,  
The conqueror's foot could never crush his will;  
With a slave's hand he might his tasks fulfil,  
But no slave's heart was his, and daily toil  
Wound not around his soul a deadening coil,  
Its higher hopes and faculties to kill.  
And so the conquerers had to yield at last,  
E'en to the conquered language, laws, and name;  
And as their sons in freedom grow, that past  
Is looked upon with reverence, not with shame,  
And hearts that beat beyond the Atlantic tide,  
Turn to that far-off time with love and pride.

## CONCLUSION.

AND now the task I planned in days gone by  
Is finished ; and I turn mine eyes once more  
From their long looking on the things of yore  
Unto the future's veiled mystery,  
Or the all-pressing present, wherein lie  
The truth-grains of that past—atoms enwrought  
With stately forms, or household words and  
thought,  
And mixed for aye with England's destiny.  
Farewell, then, country of my Saxon sires !  
By Edward's shrine I bid thee now farewell ;  
In thee were lighted first those household fires  
Where loving hearts and truthful spirits dwell ;  
Each summer glade beneath the forest tree,  
To me, old Saxon-land, shall speak of thee !

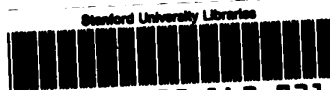
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